Super
Who gets in the VIP lounge? And why do people care?

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Lucio Tan pre-trial of P25.6-B tax case stalled

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Among the Boys
May sayasay pa ba ang Edsa II?
CELICARACHAMAN
CELIPHONE KADA LINGGO: Tues 2PM more!

GMA warns of debt crisis like Argentina in 2 years if...

By Dec. Cabacungan Jr. and Doris C. Dumlao

JUST days after getting hit with a rare notch in market credit downgrade, President Macapagal Arroyo yesterday raised anew the specter of an Argentina-type debt crisis for the Philippines in two years' time if the govern-

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Free dentures put smile on traffic enforcement

By Irene C. Perez

mail feedback@inquirer.com.ph
Saturday, February 19, 2005 • 24 pages / vol. 28 / no. 73
website: www.inq7.net

3 blast suspects known

Witness steps forward; another Makati bombing victim dies

TERRORISTS are always Muslims, grumble rankers Muslim groups led by Amab Mindanao Rep. Mujib Hataman as they hold a rally at the Chino Roces Bridge on Friday to protest the antiterrorism bill as it would likely be used against Muslims. They cite the recent arrests of Muslims as an indication. Center on Sgt. Antonio allegedly engaged in terrorist activities.

By Christine Esguerra and Nancy C. Carvajal

POLICE yesterday claimed they were closing in on three people suspected to be behind the Makati bus explosion, as the death toll from the Valentine's Day blast in the city rose to four. (See related story on Page A23.)

"We're very close. We're just waiting for the results of the operation," Director Avelino Razon Jr., National Capital Region Police Office chief, told reporters.

He said a "conscious witness" witness who surfaced Thursday to tell what he knew about the bombing had given information on the location of the suspects and police were now conducting surveillance operations.

Razon did not explain why—if the suspects' location had been pinpointed—no arrests had been made.

The operation was being carried out by officers from the Intelligence Group and Task Force Tonglalo, the Philippine National Police's main antiterrorism unit, he said.

Southern Police District director Chief Supt. Wilfredo Garcia Jr. described the witness as a Christian, in his 30s and married.

Razon said the suspects were identified based on the information given by the unnamed witness, who was identified to television reporters by his supposed alias of "Francisco."

"The witness has identified at least three suspects," Razon said.

Razon refused to elaborate on the witness' statements, saying to do so would jeopardize operations.

He said the man was no longer without.

"He knows something and he knows who he's talking about," Razon said. "We've checked his background. He has done the chief PNP and IG officers interviewed him."

Part of the witness' story was corroborated by the bus conductor's account of the bomb attack, he said.

The police said investigators were still trying to piece together other accounts of surviving passengers to arrive at a more complete picture of the incident.

Like Razon, Garcia said another group of eyewitnesses "We are already pursuing three concepts."

Garcia declined to answer questions on the witness' credibility, saying some of the information the witness provided had been verified.

"It would not be good to say that we believed him one hundred percent," the Southern police district chief said.

Garcia also said he was not discounting the possibility that the suspect's statements could just be a ploy to delay and misdirect the investigators.

"We could also be just after the half a million reward," he added.

He said the witness was now in the custody

Social cost of fighting staggering, says solon

By Cynthia D. Balana and Blanche S. Rivera

BUZZ Bag. Hamlet Arroyo yesterday lamented the "staggering" social cost of the war in his province, pointing out that the number of evacuees now surrounded by the sounds of fighting between government troops and followers of jailed Moro leader Nur Misuari.

Arroyo said he was grieving for his constituents, particularly the children who had had to bear the brunt of the fighting. He also questioned the presence of 40 US military personnel who were reportedly seen manning the Philippine military's new counter-ops base.

The lawmaker said that in any war, there were no victors, only victims.

"This is why I have the view that a military solution is not the answer to the conflict. We tested it before—it failed. It will fail again in this area," he said.

Arroyo said the employment of the "attack and destroy" strategy would never succeed and only alienate the people of Sulu.

He appealed to President Macapagal-Arroyo to declare a ceasefire in the province to enable the warring sides to talk peace.

According to Davao Archbishop Fernando Capalla, co-convenor of the Bishop-Ulama Conference of the Philippines, the government will face more and longer conflicts in Mindanao if it continues to refuse to release Misuari.

The conflict will continue as long as the Bangsamoro people do not find

Antiterror bill: 'Taxes today, liberties tomorrow'

"TODAY more taxes, tomorrow, less liberties. What next?"

Sen. Juan Ponce yesterday raised the question in the context of urging Malacañang to desist from pushing for the passage of an antiterror bill that includes the wiretapping of suspects' homes.

"Malacañang should leave the people's civil liberties alone. Those are the only things left with them," the senior citizens. What next?"

Sen. Juan Ponce yesterday raised the question in the context of urging Malacañang to desist from pushing for the passage of an antiterror bill that includes the wiretapping of suspects' homes.

"Malacañang should leave the people's civil liberties alone. Those are the

Arroyo said wiretapping was "patently unconstitutional." He also pointed out that the Supreme Court had "touched on the potential unconstitutionality" of the proposed national identification system that President Macapagal-Arroyo had urged local government units to adopt. (See story on Page A23.)

"We're living these up again!" the senior said. "Is the executive saying that it cannot solve the terrorist and chocolate problems without infringing on the Bill of Rights?"

But despite the fact that Ms Arroyo had unveiled the antiterror measure as urgent, the Senate is not about to rush it to approval.

Senate President Franklin Drilon yesterday acknowledged that the antiterrorism bill filed by Sen. Panfilo Lacson was one of the measures that senators agreed last August to give priority to.

However, he said, the Senate's legislative calendar did not include debating on a proposed antiterrorism law, at

Poverty worsened since 1997, says ADB report

By Doris C. Dumlao

POVERTY in the Philippines has worsened since the 1997 Asian currency turmoil, with population ballooning due to economic mismanagement and the country's vulnerability to external shocks.

In a report preceding the Asian Development Bank also said that while there had been episodes of sustained gross domestic product growth, this had not translated into increased average incomes to relieve the population, as a whole, or for the bottom 20 percent.

The report, titled "Poverty in the Philippines: Income, Assets and Access," said economic growth had not been high enough to keep up with population growth, keeping gross national product stagnant at around $1,000 for the past 20 years.

"This is largely a result of mismanagement of the economy, and partly a result of external shocks, to which the Philippines is particularly vulnerable," the report said.

The report said that it had been widely recognized that the impact of the 1997 crisis was not as severe in the Philippines as it was in neighboring countries, and that the Philippines was able to recover relatively quickly.

"Nevertheless, it did have an impact on poverty, undoing some of the gains made in the early to mid-1990s in terms of income poverty incidence," the report said.

It added that the crisis unfortunately came at the same time as the devastating El Niño drought.

The report said economic growth was a necessary pre-condition for poverty reduction, but that growth must be pro-poor.

"Weak macroeconomic management thwarts pro-poor growth, and the fiscal deficit and the national government debt are a major threat of the Philippine economy," it said.

"With the chronic fiscal deficit prob-

Bush names former RP envoy spy chief

WASHINGTON—President George W. Bush on Thursday named John Negroponte, a former US ambassador to the United Nations and currently the administration's top representative to Iraq, to be America's first national intelligence director.

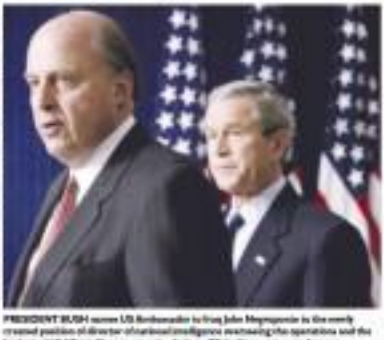
Negroponte was the American envoy to the Philippines from 1993 to 1996.

Announcing the move, Bush said that Negroponte understands global intelligence needs because he's had a long career in the foreign service. Bush said Negroponte will be his primary briefer on intelligence matters and will make decisions on the budget.

"John will make sure that these reforms don't get bottlenecked. America has the information we need to make the right decisions," the president said. "We're going to stop the terrorists before they strike."

Negroponte said he plans "reforms of the intelligence community in ways designed to best meet the intelligence needs of the 21st century."

He called the newest—the nine-day budget assignment I have undertaken in more than 40 years of government



PRESIDENT BUSH names US Ambassador to Iraq John Negroponte as the newly created position of director of national intelligence overseeing the operations and the budgets of 15 US intelligence agencies during a White House press conference.

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Rain in parts and the eastern sections of Visayas and Mindanao with scattered showers and thunderstorms. The rest of the country will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers.

Second FRONTPAGE

Gov't target: 1 million OFWs

RP BEAUTY IN JAKARTA

Putting last touches beforehand, the Philippine bet for the Miss Asean 2005 beauty contest, Beatriz Javier, puts a traditional Filipiniana while sharing an Indonesian remembers shop in Jakarta. AP

By Jerome Aning

THE PHILIPPINES hopes to deploy a million overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) this year as traditional, as well as new and emerging markets in many parts of the world continue to open their doors to OFWs.

Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas yesterday said she was confident that the 933,536 documented OFWs deployed in 2004 would be surpassed this year with the opening of 14 new destinations for OFWs.

Sto. Tomas says signed that sending Filipinos overseas was not something to be ashamed of because of low wages and prevailing unemployment.

Listed in the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration's 2005 marketing plan as new OFW destinations are Israel for caregivers, tourism and construction workers; Macao for hotel and casino workers; Singapore and China for teachers; Australia, Hawaii, Trinidad and Tobago, and South Africa for health care workers; the Cayman Islands for restaurant workers; the Bahamas for medical and related workers; the United Kingdom for social workers and physical and occupational therapists; Kazakhstan for technical and professional workers in the oil, energy and construction sectors, and Iran for skilled workers.

The government-private venture of South Korea to take in "new entrants" of more than 5,000 Filipino workers in the POEA over a 200-per-cent increase over last year's deployment. Spain of 600 nurse "streamline hiring procedures."

Taiwan's special hiring program will generate at least 3,000 jobs for production workers.

On the market-share front, deployment of new hires to new overseeing places predicted to continue to grow by at least six percent over the next to 2005.

POEA Administrator Rosalinda Baldoz said that with the potential job fairs in the Japanese market, the almost 65,000—as result of stricter recruitment rules for performing artists—about 45,000 overseas jobs could be generated with the new and additional opportunities in the 14 markets.

Sto. Tomas said recent developments of Israeli-Gaza workers, the Palestine-Israel conflict and the Asian bird flu epidemic would not affect the deployment of OFWs.

Among those was the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas report that what it called "hot money" reached $3.5 billion in 2004, confirming the OSY connections.

The defending of the Philippines from the Asia-based Financial Action Task Force's money laundering list also gave impetus to the relief OFWs as remittances from abroad were safeguarded, she added.

To ensure that the one-million mark and other goals would be achieved, Sto. Tomas said OWSC and POEA, in coordination with the legitimate private recruitment industry, would be conducting nine-round high-level marketing missions to tap and strengthen OFW markets.

She said DOLE would proceed with the 2nd International Employers Summit and the latest national jobs fair within the year.

Undersecretary for employment Danilo Cruz reflected the DOLE's role in the area: maintain and boost strengths in the traditional markets, tap new and emerging markets, ensure the welfare and reintegration programs for the benefit of OFWs and their families, and reduce the efforts against illegal recruiters.

Palace bent on salvaging VAT bill

By Cynthia Pablo, GFC, Cabacungan Jr. and Christine G. Avendaño

SIDE—Strong opposition from members, anyone are about to endorse the unpopular bill—raising the value-added tax from the present 10 percent to 12 percent.

Malacañang, according to Rep. Jose Solis de Cabanatuan, Abra), is calling for a meeting by the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council to whip senators into toeing the VAT increase policy.

"President Macapagal-Arroyo can't afford to lose the vote for VAT. The administration will invest on it" Solis said, play all its cards to get it. In politics it is an 'all-or' situation," Solis said in an interview.

Sabonis said the Palace will hold the Leday meeting on Tuesday.

Asked if Malacañang will use the occasion to make senators toe the line, Sabonis said: "We will do just that."

"If we allow them (senators) to have other ways, they would just prove that Moody's was right when it downgraded the Philippines' credit rating due to...among others, the slow pace of fiscal reforms.

At the House of Representatives, Reps. Rodolfo Mar Dalton, Gilda Elejo and Teodoro Locsin Jr. (NPC-Makati) have also proposed a "grace, through prohibited" clause that will bar taxpayers from appearing on the higher one to consumers.

"They are not supposed to pass on the VAT to consumers," Locsin explains. He is hinted on the principle that VAT is "not a concealing tax."

Violators will be penalized through public bilities, Locsin said he will propose penal provisions to compel compliance.

"Maybe. They might consider that," Locsin said when asked whether such clause will roll on the opportunistic senators to the VAT bills.

But Malacañang itself appears to have bound down its chalice for a higher VAT and is now leaning for the imposition of excises in a bid to remove exemptions rather than raising VAT from 10 percent to 12 percent.

The lawmaker is that Congress will pass one measure that will help ease fiscal problem. Any measure that will address fiscal situation will be welcome. What is important is the end result," said then secretary Ignacio Bunye in a briefing.

Bunye, however, refused to categorically state Malacañang's position on the VAT rate hike after the Senate wins and incurs committee declared Thursday that it may junk the proposed VAT hike and recommends that VAT to 10 percent but EC all exemptions accepted by independent power producers, railroads, shipping companies and cooperatives.

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Ex-Citibanker appointed new national treasurer

By Michelle V. Rosca and Doris C. Dumlao

CRUZ

RUIZ appointed Finance Secretary Jesus Purisima has chosen former Citibanker Omar Cruz to head the Bureau of Treasury, replacing National Treasurer Norma Lerado.

"Omar has a lot of experience in the area of treasury and capital markets," Purisima said yesterday in a press briefing. He said he personally picked Cruz, whom he had known through his dealings with the business community.

Purisima said he was already processing the appointment papers of Cruz, but that the latter will assume his highest post at the Treasury once the processing is completed.

The appointment of Cruz goes against the will of officers and employees from the Bureau of Treasury that have been pushing for the appointment of Lerado to national treasurer. Deputy Treasurer Eduardo Abesadola earlier told the officers and employees of the Treasury believed "we have finally found a good treasurer" in the person of Lerado, whom he described as someone who has matured professionally in the Treasury.

Abesadola said the Treasury had seen no reason/action to Malacañang, one from the employees' union and the other from the officers, asking President Macapagal-Arroyo to retain Lerado.

Abesadola said he believed domestic investors would not accept the fleeing from Lerado as the market favors the leadership of Lerado, who assumed the highest post at the Treasury in December last year after the resignation of former Treasurer Leonardo Illusorio.

The replacement of Lerado is rumored to have been requested by key forty executives in a directive from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas to require third-party executives for debt investments, including government securities.

Under BSP Circular No. 392, securities will have to be registered to include those have secured accreditation from the BSP to act as custodians.

The Bureau of Treasury, however, is asserting that government securities need not be sold also to a third-party custodian because it is mandated to do the job. According to Lerado, the Treasury is not only issuer of government securities but also a custodian.

Purisima said his decision to appoint a new Treasurer had nothing to do with Lerado, but only his preference to work with someone he is familiar with.

When asked how he felt about his appointment, Cruz told the Inquirer: "I'm here to do a job. It's a good challenge."

Cruz has had 27 years of work experience in treasury, securities trading, risk management and investment and investment banking and business economic research.

An ex-Citibanker, he is the chief finance officer of the Bank of Asia and the Pacific and the director and vice president of the Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines.

He is also a director and dean of ABK (ABK) Bank's audit committee and is director of BankBuildings Inc., a regional consultant of Citigroup Singapore and trustee and treasurer of The Philippine Millennial Policy Foundation Inc.

Cruz has graduated at Oakland, B.A., he handled securities trading, private banking, financial institutions group, compliance and risk management and treasury. With Reuters

Erap's shortest trip: One hour

By Armand M. Nocum

BOOM! of his shortest trip outside his detention center in Tanay, Rizal, ousted President Joseph Estrada yesterday spent just an hour for a medical check-up at the Cardinal Santos Medical Center in San Juan.

Estrada left Tanay at 9 a.m. in choppy air and at the hospital at 10 a.m. and was out of there by 11 a.m., also by chopper. In the past, Estrada would ask that he be allowed to visit his mother whenever he can as she stays. He also said.

His personal doctor, Leonardo Perez, said Estrada's condition is stable and fairly okay this month. Estrada was rushed to the hospital for "emergency."

Perez said Estrada had some blood work and X-ray done. "His lungs are almost clear," he said.

Marcos also advised the former leader to get plenty of rest and to go slow in resuming vigorous activities.

He reminded Estrada of his promise that Estrada has no problems with his newly-expressed knees, saying he can now walk better, albeit with a cane.

SATURDAY, FEB

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

SPORTS

A1

E-mail at _sports@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Teddyboy S. Melendres

[illegible] NG PATRON ID, VA[illegible]
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La Salle bet smashes old Del Prado mark

Sensational Soguilon a cinch to make RP team

By Marc Anthony Reyes

DEMO del Prado's 20-year-old sprint record fell off the books yesterday when La Salle dynamo Ralph Weldy Soguilon zoomed like a bullet off the blocks to win the UAAP 200-meter dash finals.

Soguilon bagged a second gold medal in the meet and flashed in glory after eclipsing the national record set by one of the Philippines' most remarkable track stars.

He's four-[illegible] Electronics and Communications Engineering student clocked 21.43 seconds to shatter Del Prado's standard of 21.44 seconds set during the Asean Cup held here on Dec. 2, 1984.

Soguilon confided that his primary aim was only to better his personal best, but surprised himself by shattering the record Del Prado had set in the past he watches's.

Soguilon has been campaigning in the national level for the last five years, winning several National Open titles. He also competed in the Asian Grand Prix, held twice here since 2003.

"My goal right now is to make the national team and finally make it to the Southeast Asian Games," said Soguilon, who will most likely be taken in the national training pool.

He didn't appear too concerned about his clocking after crossing the finish all alone, but was happily stunned upon being informed by national coach Joji Penalosa of his feat.

"I didn't intend to break it [record] because I was only trying to improve my [400]- record of 21.68 seconds," said Soguilon. "I am really happy because I broke a record which is older than me."

Del Prado was in prominence with the likes of Lydia de Vega-Mercado and Elma Muros-Posadas during the Ginebra Alay heydays in the 1980s.

FOR THE BOOKS: LA SALLE marvel Weldy Soguilon explodes off the starting blocks on his way to eclipsing the 200-meter record of former Asian champion Isidro del Prado.

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NOTE:
[illegible]

[illegible]

Washington 1st applicant in 2005 PBA rookie draft

By Jane Navarro

BE was born in Lumberton, raised in the United States and matured in the country where he felt ripe enough for the Philippine Basketball Association.

Anthony Washington's PBA dream yesterday gained ground as the perennial cop-owned pick now assures his name the first applicant for the 2005 season rookie draft.

The Best Alfredo-Barry de Guzman juvenile was finally [illegible] last night. The 6-foot-6 Alfredo will play for the Pacific Express while the 6-foot-9 Ole Orcampo will move to the Alaska fiefdom.

With his Filipino mother Velma in tow, the 6-foot, 7 [illegible] Student of the Year has submitted some of the requirements needed to get his name included in the official roster of draftees to be identified by the PBA.

Washington, whose father Victor was a U.S. permanent resident decided to [illegible] will be crowned by a new [illegible] ing requiring Filipino foreign players to present additional documents to prove their citizenship.

"He applied early for the draft so that we will know what other requirements he needs to satisfy before the deadline," said Washington's agent, Charlie Oy.

The deadline for applicants of foreign-born Filipino players is May 1 while foreign-born players will have to apply on or before July 15, in time for the Aug. 7 draft.

Based on league guidelines for rookie applicants, foreign-bred players must submit an authentic birth certificate issued by the National Statistics Office or any equivalent if the player was not born in the country; authenticated birth certificate of his parents; marriage certificate of the parents or, in its absence, any proof of affiliation, including NSA [illegible].

Foreign-born players must also submit duly notarized and authentic naturalization papers of the parents and all duties of at least three persons according to the player's Filipino lineage.

Foreign-born applicants will also be interviewed by the league and should have played at least 20 games in an amateur commercial or collegiate league before he gets included in the final consolidated list of draftees.

Those documents are apart from the Department of Justice confirmation and the Immigration's certificate of recognition required by the league.

"When I asked (PBA) commissioner (Noli) Eala about Anthony's case, he told me that the BOI confirmation is needed. So necessary documents since the applicant is already a US [illegible] passport holder," said Oy.

"I'm pretty excited to [be] in the PBA, but I will have one unfortunate left with Mikroni," said the 23-year-old Washington. "I want my mom to win a championship before I venture into the PBA."

Washington aspired for the Aug. 7 draft along with Michael Holper, a 6-foot-6 forward who plays for 80 Phillippines in the PBL.

Holper, whose mother is a full-blood self-Filipina, also possessed a birth certificate, Filipino passport and the birth certificates of his parents.

At the age of nine back in 1983, Washington moved to this province left [illegible] for Florida in the United States where he played college ball for Eckerd College, an NCAA Division II school.

The 23-year-old Holper, whose father is half-Filipino, was born and raised in the US. he played for NCAA Division I school San Diego State College.

WASHINGTON: Lively Hu // draft pick

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Cops foil Zambo bomb plot

ZAMBOANGA CITY—The police here foiled an alleged plan of the Abu Sayyaf to bomb parts of the city following the arrest of a purported member of the bandit group in Barangay Baliwasan on Thursday.

Chief Supt. Victor Simeon, Western Mindanao commander, declined to reveal the areas where the attacks were supposed to take place.

He said Ismad Tahjid, who was arrested on Thursday, was a bomb suspect allegedly trained by Abu Sayyaf spokesperson Abu Sulaiman.

Supt. Angelito Cedeno, regional police intelligence chief, said Tahjid had been identified as a bomb-making expert by two former Abu Sayyaf members who are in the Department of Justice's Witness Protection Program.

Cedeno said Tahjid was "waiting for the chemical components for explosives from General Santos City" when he was arrested.

"We are catching up with them, but give us enough time," he told reporters on Thursday at the Philippine Public Safety College Regional Training School in Tuburan (Basilan) in Davao City.

Reports said three had already been killed in the attacks.

Tahjid allegedly participated in the abduction of schoolchildren and teachers in Basilan in 2000, and the kidnapping of guests at the Jose Pidal Resort in Puerto Princesa in 2001.

Cedeno said Tahjid was planning to plant bombs in highly volatile installations like gas depots and gasoline stations in the city.

In Davao City, Mayor Rodrigo Duterte said authorities were very close to catching the suspects he linked the bomb explosion at the Ecoland Cafe (Overland) Terminal in Davao City that killed a 12-year-old boy and wounded six others.

"We are catching up with them, but give us enough time," he told reporters on Thursday at the Philippine Public Safety College Regional Training School in Tuburan (Basilan) in Davao City.

Reports said three had already identified the group that masterminded the terminal bombing but refused to name the members so as not to jeopardize the ongoing investigation.

He said he was inclined to believe that a 14-year-old boy left the bag that reportedly contained the bomb which exploded at the terminal's front C.R. He added that this was not the same boy who died in the explosion.

In General Santos City, DNP chief Director Orin Edjardo Ardjuna ordered a manhunt for the suspect in the St. Valentine's Day bombing of Lateens Mall, which killed three civilians and injured 40 others.

Chief Supt. Antonio Villasan, Central Mindanao police director, told the Inquirer that Ardjuna had issued the order during his short visit to the city on Thursday to attend the PNP's 104th celebration of General Mariano Peñar Command.

"His order was for us to expedite the capture of the suspects," Villasan said. . . Judy L. Miranda, Anthony S. Alfanta and Angeline J. Zarsia, PDI Mindanao Bureau

TYPHOON-STRICKEN—Evacuees in the south does not deter US envoy Richard Rovinsa from visiting Cotabato City to oversee broadband project is funded by his government. AP

Newsmen in Jolo told: Be extra careful

By Nikko Dizon

THE MILITARY has warned journalists covering the conflict in Jolo to be "extra careful" that they are not taken hostage by Muslim rebels.

Military intelligence chief Lt. Col. Buenaventura Pascual issued the warning yesterday, after receiving intelligence that Abu Sayyaf kidnap gang and armed followers of former Moro National Liberation Front chief Nur Misuari had invited key media personalities for exclusive interviews in their camps in the jungles of Jolo.

Pascual said there was a "high probability" that these media personalities, in their desire to score a scoop, would be held hostage by the rebels.

Journalists who fail to heed the warning should be ready to face the consequences of their actions, he said.

"The Armed Forces of the Philippines has received reports that key leaders of the Abu Sayyaf and the Misuari breakaway group are inviting media reporters for exclusive interviews in Jolo. Please do not accept the offer," Pascual warned.

"The Abu Sayyaf has done this before that resulted in the abduction of press people," Pascual said.

At the height of the Muslim hostage crisis in nearby Basilan ahead in 2000, several foreign and local journalists who were allowed to enter the bandits' lair for interviews ended up being hostaged by the terrorists. Some of these journalists were later released after paying ransom. They were also robbed of their personal belongings.

Pascual stressed that military operations against the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF breakaway group were still under way. He appealed to media to "cooperate" with the military and not compromise the situation in Jolo.

"The military operations are ongoing against these two armies. Your cooperation will speed up not only the operations against the Abu Sayyaf and Misuari breakaway group but will also help save lives," he said.

Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz meanwhile commended the Army MILF guerrillas who were considered into military service.

"The performance of the integrees is commendable," Cruz told reporters in Camp Aguinaldo yesterday, citing a report Deputy Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Efraim Abu.

There has been concern in military circles about the loyalty of MILF integrees after it is feared, might switch allegiance to the battalion and engage government forces.

"But the integrees understand the situation that these groups must be defeated because they are terrorist who have different methodologies and will harm innocent people," Cruz said.

The integration of former MILF members into the military was part of the provisions of the peace agreement that the MILF signed with the Philippine government in 1996.

Moro rebel chief open to truce but also ready to fight to the end

A MORO rebel commander battling troops on Jolo Island said that his forces would be open to a truce there but is ready to fight to the end if the military doesn't stop pursuing them.

"We're on active defense. If they punish us, we will punish back," Habir Malik, a follower of jailed Muslim rebel leader Nur Misuari, said by satellite phone last Thursday.

He said any cease-fire should be initiated by the government, otherwise "the killing will continue. The arms would continue."

About 5,000 soldiers and marines have been pursuing Misuari's followers—backed by al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf guerrillas—since they attacked an army detachment in Patikul town on Feb. 7, provoking clashes that killed 27 soldiers and wounded 72 others. Troops have killed 27 gunmen and wounded scores of others, the military said.

The rebels claimed the attacks were in retaliation for the deaths of several people, including a child, who were caught in crossfire when troops assaulted a community of Misuari's followers while pursuing suspected Abu Sayyaf members.

"They are killing even children, women . . . if we don't react, nothing will happen so we just reserved," Malik said.

He also denied that his group has bonded with the Abu Sayyaf.

"We are against the Abu Sayyaf. I was against them since before. Their views do not conform with mine," he added.

An Abu Sayyaf spokesman, Abu Sulaiman, earlier claimed Abu Sayyaf militants have joined Misuari's followers in fighting government troops to avenge the death of the child and its parents, who were related to some Misuari followers and Abu Sayyaf members.

Sulaiman also claimed responsibility for the Valentine's Day bombings in Manila and two other cities that killed seven people and wounded at least 120 others. AP

Philippine College of Occupational Medicine, Inc.

27th Annual National Convention

"Strengthening Linkages Toward a Healthy Workplace"

Edsa Shangri-La Hotel, Mandaluyong City February 20-22, 2005

MESSAGES

My warmest greetings to the officers and members of the Philippine College of Occupational Medicine, Inc. on your Annual National Convention. The theme of your Convention, "Strengthening Linkages Toward a Healthy Workplace" is very relevant as we are joining together our efforts to raise and strengthen people's awareness on the importance of occupational safety and health in the workplace. For almost 40 years, PCOM has been the forerunner in occupational medicine and its efforts have been duly supported by a network of colleagues all over the country, all espousing the need to care for the workers' health and maximize productivity. We believe that it was your ardent desire to spread the word that has enabled your organization to the support it now enjoys, not only from the labor sector but also from members of the academe and private organizations.

We join PCOM in its campaign to promote a healthy workplace. We share in your belief that the safe introduction of modern technology in the workplace, the worker and his welfare must always be our primary concern as employers. The Convention, therefore, is a great opportunity to contribute your expertise and experience in this particular field to improve the overall health and working conditions with the end in view of improving the quality of life. Congratulations!

HARRISON C. TANSIP III, MD, MHA
President and CEO, Philhealth Insurance Corporation

Warm Welcome to all delegates of the 27th PCOM Annual Convention.

Your active participation in our annual convention truly validates our goal in strengthening our intra-professional quality and peace.

JESUS C. GAYLLO, MD, FPCOM
National President

With great pride and pleasure, we welcome you to the 27th Annual National Convention of the Philippine College of Occupational Medicine.

This is an opportunity for all of us to once again meet, exchange ideas, knowledge and enhance the bonds we have established in the annual conventions of Occupational Medicine.

Our theme, "Strengthening Linkages Toward a Healthy Workplace" expresses the need and importance of being able to fortify our relationship of working more closely with other specialties, institutions, government and other occupational health agencies for a more holistic, meaningful and relevant practice of Occupational Medicine. We look forward to a very successful convention!

OSCAR B. TIMIS, MD, FPCOM
National Vice President & General Convention Chair

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

	Sunday, 20 February		Monday, 21 February	Tuesday, 22 February
07:30				
08:00	Sports Activities	Preconference Workshop	Opening Ceremonies	Dr. Gregorio Diaz Memorial Lecture
08:30				Presentation of PCOM Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Rosario Ilo
09:00			Opening of Exhibits	Coffee Break
09:30			Session I	Session II
10:00				
10:30				
11:00				
11:30	Luncheon Symposium		Luncheon Symposium	Luncheon Symposium
12:00				
12:30				
13:00				
13:30			Viewing of Poster Presentations and Business Meeting (Exclusive)	Session III
14:00				Coffee Break
14:30				Session IV
15:00				
15:30				
16:00	Holy Mass		Fellowship Night	Free Time
16:30				
17:00				
17:30	PCOM National Officers & Board Members' Meeting with Chapter Presidents		Presentations of PCOM Chapters	Closing Ceremonies
18:00				
18:30				
19:00				
19:30				

The Philippine College of Occupational Medicine, Inc. (PCOM) is the prime mover of occupational health activities in the country. It is recognized by the Department of Labor and Employment and the Philippine Medical Association as the specialty association in Occupational Medicine. PCOM is an affiliate member of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) and the Asian Association of Occupational Health (AAOH). Through its 14 chapters nationwide, it provides a vital link to the economy and progress of the country through a healthy workforce in a safe working place. The 2000-member physicians advocate the promotion of health, safety, prevention and management of diseases of workers in all occupations all over the country.

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SC sacks 4 court workers

Philip C. Tabeza

THE SUPREME Court has dismissed four court employees in Rizal, two of them for failing to remit P1.2 million worth of collections for the Judiciary Development Fund and other court funds.

In a 41-page decision, the tribunal dismissed Hinagdanan Regional Trial Court clerk of court Manuel Banting of Binangonan and Clerk III Ms. Luisa Tuanora of Binangonan for failing to remit P1,242,117.38.

It also sacked two other Rizal clerks of court—Ermelina Bernardino of Cardona and Liberlied San Juan of Pililla—Julia Joly for failing to remit their collections on time.

The resolution and behavior of everyone connected with an office charged with the dispensation of justice, the court's letter not excepted, from the presiding judge to the lowest clerk, must be circumscribed with the heavy burden of responsibility," the tribunal said.

The court found them guilty of gross neglect of duty, dishonesty, and grave misconduct and forfeited all of their retirement benefits, except accrued leave credits. They were also barred from reemployment in government, including government-owned and -controlled corporations.

The court ordered Banting and Tuanora to reimburse in give bank, within 30 days, the missing court funds and for the Office of the Court Administrator to ensure that criminal cases are filed against them.

The tribunal noted that it had to discipline mandating that the daily collections for the court funds should be deposited every day with the Land Bank of the Philippines and that clerks of court and accountable officers should submit monthly reports of collections to the high court within a prescribed period.

But in August 1998, the tribunal discovered that there were irregularities in the 200 collection and remittances in the court in Rizal province.

The Office of the Court Administrator immediately conducted an audit and discovered that Banting failed to remit P1.2 million worth of JDF funds.

The tribunal rejected Banting's claim that Tuanora should be blamed for the funds since she was the one who collected the fees and recorded the transactions.

The court said Banting had general supervision over all personnel since he was the clerk of court of the Binangonan RTC. However, it also found Tuanora liable for the shortage since she was the cashier and cash clerk.

The tribunal also noted that Tuanora had abandoned her post at the Binangonan court.

Beware of drugs you buy in Ilocos, DOH warns

By Blanche S. Rivera

THE DEPARTMENT of Health yesterday revealed that 30 percent of drugstores and pharmacies in the Ilocos region were selling counterfeit drugs made of saline flour.

A random inspection by DOH regional officials last year found nine drugstores in the region's seven provinces selling fake drugs.

Eduardo Zuzuaño, Ilocos regional director, said samples of the drugs that were confiscated and brought to the Bureau of Food and Drugs showed that they were made of salt—a flour while some were imported but not registered with the BFAD.

Zuzuaño said the drug centers that were selling the counterfeit drugs were mostly in the outskirts and rush flock.

The DOH, which launched an awareness campaign on counterfeit drugs last year, said the most common counterfeit drug products inspectors found in drugstores were:

- anti-hypertensive such as Adalat Oros 20mg
- anti-asthma such as Ventolin Expectorant syrup
- analgesic such as Ponstan 500
- anti-diarrheas such as Diatabs Bella-assistamol, and
- vitamins such as Propan with iron Capsule, Cerelin 100 mg/5 ml syrup, Enervon Cand Enervon 500.

The government monitored 200 drug outlets last year and collected 1,176 drug products for quality and safe checks.

The laboratory analysis done on 28 of the said products showed that they did not conform to label claims, Nancy Lacuna, director chief of the BFAD regulatory division 1, said in a statement.

NEWSBRIEFS

Ship blast kills Pinoy

A 51-YEAR-OLD Filipino was killed while another was seriously injured after a gas cylinder exploded on board a ship docked in Labuan, eastern Malaysia, the Department of Labor and Employment reported yesterday. Labor Attaché to Malaysia Brenda Villanueva identified the fatality as Segundino Castro, who was from Sta. Ana, Cagayan. Villanueva, citing the report of the Labuan fire and rescue department chief James Nicholls, said a gas cylinder exploded on board MV Ocean Spirit, which is docked in a jetty for repairs, around 2:30 p.m. Thursday. Castro was hurled into the adjacent Pacific sea. It was presumed that the fatal blast among the crew repairing the ship, whose captain, Rosecon Manalo, was also from Cagayan. **Jeremy Andig**

Capalla off to Banda Aceh

RECIPROCATING the help it received for the typhoon victims last year, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines would turn over donations for the tsunami victims in Indonesia today. Bishop Deogratias Fernando Capalla, CBCP president, left for Banda Aceh yesterday with what he said was "a small amount" collected from parishes and schools all over the Philippines. Capalla also brought letters of hope written by children in a Pasig school to encourage their fellow children who lost their families in the biggest natural disaster to strike the globe in decades. About one-third of the fatalities in the Dec. 26 tsunami were children, according to reports by international aid agencies. Capalla himself hand-over the donations to the Archbishop of Medan Diosk, the nearest Catholic city to the Muslim-dominated Aceh province. He said the name Pasig school that asked them to deliver the letters also sought to raise around P400,000 in donations for the tsunami victims. **Blanche S. Rivera**

US to give DND $4M

THE DEFENSE department is set to receive this year $4 million in assistance from the United States to be used for the development of intelligence capability of the Philippine military to fight terrorism. In an interview with reporters in Camp Aguinaldo yesterday, Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz said the amount would be used primarily to upgrade equipment and training of intelligence agents. "There is a four-million dollar assistance that the Americans have allocated to us and in the upgrade of equipment and training of intelligence elements. I think we would be able to draw this (from the US government) this year," Cruz said. He stressed the need to improve the intelligence gathering capability of the military, following a series of bomb attacks in Makati, Cotabato City, Davao City and Davao City on Valentine's Day. "(There's a need to) keep on assessing, keep on preparing and keep on improving (the) intelligence (of the AFP). This (US assistance) can improve in terms... (to) new equipment, and (maybe) new structures so that the intelligence service of the armed forces would be efficient," Cruz explained. **Alexis Page**

Hope for hurting marriages

RETROVISION LY is a program to help hurting couples heal and renew their marriage relationship. The word, Retrouvaille, simply means "rediscovery." The program offers the chance to rediscover yourself, your spouse, and your relationship in your marriage. Tens of thousands of couples have so far separation have successfully saved their marriages by joining the program. Retrouvaille is a two-to-weekend and post-weekend program for married couples whose they are encouraged to put the pain behind and start "rediscovering" one another again. The weekend to see a retreats over as post-weekend sessions have been designed to continue the marriage renewal that began on the weekend. A Retrouvaille weekend will be held on March 11-13 at the SMDC Formation House, Antipolo City. For details, call P.L.Dino City at (02) 2361. Metro and Manila at 800-6857, and Mindanao at (082) 296-6857. All names will be kept in strict confidence. To learn more about the program, visit the Retrouvaille International website, http://retrouvaille.org or call (02) 740-1680.

Soriano, 79

ALBUFOV Soriano died on Feb. 17 in Pasig City. He was 79. Soriano was the husband of Fernanda Alonso of Jaro, Iloilo City and father of Aaron, married to Angelica "Jaka" Macaraeg; Agnes, married to Rene Alerta; and Fernanda, wife of Dr. Robert A.M. Zuñiga. He had eight grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. Soriano's body lies in state in Sorsogon Pro. Social Hall, Pasig City. He will be buried at the Loyola Memorial, Pasig, on Feb. 20, after a 7 p.m. Mass. Soriano lived and worked with his daughter Agnes and husband Romeo in New York from 1974 to 1986. He was born in Pili, Camarines Sur, on March 8, 1925.

THE CASE for Lucio Tan is argued by his lawyer Estelito Mendoza while State Prosecutors Susan Ducusin, Estelito Soko and Roberto Abad listen. Documents gathered from the DOJ and BIR, which constitutes the evidence against Tan and 69 others, may be partly seen on the table at the Manila Metropolitan Trial Court.

Lucio Tan tax pre-trial stalled

By Luige A. del Puerto

MORE than a month has passed and three Presidents installed in office, but the P20-billion tax evasion case against the country's richest man continues to be bogged down at the pre-trial level.

At the end of a lengthy debate at the sala of Judge Alex Ruiz of the Manila Metropolitan Trial Court yesterday, the only thing that the prosecution and the defense managed to agree on was to schedule more hearings this month, ending the government's huge volume of evidence against tobacco and beer tycoon Lucio Tan.

At this rate, it would take at least six months to finish marking all the documents, which is not even part of the trial proper, state prosecutors said.

Defense lawyer Estelito Mendoza used his considerable legal skills into holding down the prosecution and paving his way to have the evidence pre-marked.

By prosecutor Susan Ducusin's estimate, it would take some 25 days to mark all the documents, at the rate of nine a week, that would take at least half a year to finish. And that concerned only the pre-marking of evidence, not the trial proper itself, she said.

How to speed up trial

At one point, Mendoza, a former justice secretary of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and who also represented ousted President Joseph Estrada in his impeachment trial, told the government, suggesting that it should "march the P27 billion" it is after.

Since the case is very important to the government, it should assign "50 prosecutors or 100 prosecutors" to it to speed up the trial, Mendoza told the court.

The government started the case against Tan in 1995 during the term of President Ramos but has so far failed to start a conviction.

Tan pleaded not guilty to charges that he allegedly failed to pay taxes totaling P20.6 billion between 1990 and 1995 during his participation in the Maritime Metropolitan Trial Court on Jan. 8.

The lower court had dismissed the charges against Tan and 69 others in 1999 but reinstated the tax cases last year after the Supreme Court ordered a retrial.

'Dummy' companies

The government alleged that Tan and officers of his Fortune Tobacco Corp. used nine "dummy" marketing companies to avoid paying P20.6 billion in excise, income and value-added taxes for the years 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Among the documents that the prosecution brought in court yesterday were some of the damaging testimonial records of Fortune Tobacco that looked like they could fill up an entire cabinet.

A bureau of Internal Revenue official said they needed three vans to transport the documents, although a number of passengers also shared the vans.

To simplify and reduce the number of documents for pre-marking, the prosecution had submitted to the defense a list of proposed facts to be stipulated, that is, facts that the two sides could already agree to admit in court.

'Truckloads'

But Mendoza refused, insisting that the law required the "truckloads" of documentary evidence to be pre-marked.

"Apparently, Mr. Mendoza just doesn't want to admit [Congress] goes on to Lenten break.

In a phone interview, Drilon said the weeks before the Lenten break would see the chamber devoting its time to approving economic measures.

For now, he said, the Senate was still busy with the approval of the amendments to the proposed supplemental value added tax law. He said Congress was expected to next put priority on the banking industry.

"We have no time to take up [the proposed antiterrorism law]. If we do, we'll be short on the projects of the economic bills," he said.

Drilon recalled that last year's congressional debates on the matter had been "controversial."

"It's something new and it ushers a lot of unresolved ground. It's not enough reason to pass," he said.

Public suffering

For Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago, a Philippine antiterror law is not necessary.

"I don't want the Senate to rush on passing this bill because all antiterrorism bills everywhere in the world have always resulted in provisions that in effect run counter to the bill of Rights of any particular country," Santiago said in a phone interview.

"In other words," she said, "an antiterror bill makes the entire public suffer for the criminal acts of a few."

According to Santiago, among the things that citizens will face with an antiterrorism law in place are curfews and checkpoints, signaling "a generalization of the liberties and freedom of the general citizenry."

She said that even if an antiterrorism bill was passed, "no country has been safe from terrorism."

"Apparently, nothing in our history of law enforcement indicates that these restrictions and limitations on individual freedom were able to prevent a terrorist attack," she said. "So what's the point?"

Secession

Santiago said it would be difficult to come up with an antiterror law and noted that "the lawyer using the law is supposed to address the cause of terrorism."

"And in our country, it appears to be the desire for secession," she said.

The government should address the secession problem as it comes to national policy, Santiago said, adding:

"Decentralize and autonomy of criminality and law enforcement."

Against Muslims

Anak Mindanao Rep. Mujib Hataman insisted that the proposed antiterror law would likely be put against Muslims.

"When people speak of terrorism, the concept is that they are always Muslims," the party-list representative said in a phone interview.

Hataman yesterday led a rally of Anak Mindanao at the Don Chino Roces Bridge in Manila, where they condemned the Valentine's Day bombings and expressed opposition to the passage of an antiterror bill.

He said his constituents feared that the proposed law would likely be used to harass or fabricate cases against the followers of Islam.

"Why the need for such a bill when there is a Revised Penal Code (RPC)?" Hataman said.

He said that if lawmakers were serious on pushing for the passage of the measure, they should explain why it was needed and why it would not duplicate provisions in the RPC.

Hataman also said that in view of increasing on the amount meant for police, police and military officials should intensify their intelligence-gathering skills.

He said the P300-million intelligence budget should have been increased long ago, especially since the amount was bigger than the entire budgets of some bureau of government agencies.

Sufficient powers

Another antiterror measure, filed by Eastern Samar Rep. Marcelino Libanan, is pending in the House.

But Deputy Minority Leader and Negros Occ. Rep. Francis Escudero said other party-list representatives—Liza Maza of Gabriela and Joel Virador of Bayan Muna—said there was no need for an antiterror law.

"The President has enough powers to run the show on this. There is no need for special powers at a time law to effectively combat the problem of terrorism," Escudero said.

Biazo said the government should not "burn the whole house to catch a few rats."

She said the consolidated bill being drafted by the House committee on justice after committee hearings on warrantless arrests and 30-day detention without charges.

Then, she said, would proceed into a floater of violation of human rights because the accused person must surrender or register of membership to an organization that the government had defined as terrorist.

The country must not be ruled by paranoia but by reason, Biazo also pointed the people have these infringements on civil liberties," Maza said.

'McCarthyist'

Virador and progressive groups in the House would block the passage of the measure, Biazo said since it is submitted for plenary voting.

He said such a "McCarthyist measure" would only fuel further public unrest as it would deepen with what remained of the people's civil, political and human rights.

"The operational definition of terrorism is so vague and unwieldy that any activity can be encompassed and labeled as an act of terror," he said.

Too much

Virador also said the last two years being imposed by the government on the people were already too much for them to bear and could cause widespread discontent. —Reports by Jerome Aning, Lira Ebus, Christine O. Avendaño, Cynthia D. Rubianes and Leila Salaverria

Antiterror bill: 'Taxes today, less liberties tomorrow'

Front page A1

Negroponte: From one tough assignment to another

WASHINGTON—Picking the most difficulty of his new job as UN intelligence chief in perspective, John D. Negroponte said Thursday it was the most challenging assignment he has had in 40 years of government service.

And that includes a hitch, since the 63-year-old career diplomat has two posts more UN ambassador to the UN and chief of a bloody anti-El uprising and, before that, ambassador to the United Nations during the crisis with the world organization over declining over the looming war to depose President Saddam Hussein.

President George W. Bush, at a White House news conference with Negroponte at his side, gave some indication of the difficulty of his adviser's latest task, saying he would be in overall charge of all US intelligence with the goal of "ensuring we connect the dots before they strike."

According to one well-informed administration official, former CIA director Robert Gates was Bush's first choice but Gates declined to take on the defiant job of transforming the US intelligence community from that of an ossified relic of cold war thinking to one capable of dealing with the terrorist threat of the 21st century.

Bush named Lt. Gen. Mike Hayden, who has served as director of the National Security Agency since March 1999, as Negroponte's deputy. He is the longest serving director of the secretive code-breaking agency and has presided over changes, such as adding longtime agency restraints to retain and increasing reliance on technology contractors.

"If we're going to stop the terrorists before they strike," Bush said, "we must overcome the current intelligence agencies' weak as a single, unified enterprise."

Negroponte, 63, who at the United Nations when he was tapped to take on the difficult

Burmese leader arriving tomorrow

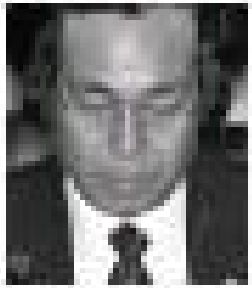
RANGOON Prime Minister Lt. Gen. Soe Win is scheduled to arrive in Manila tomorrow night for an official visit, the Department of Foreign Affairs said yesterday.

Soe Win, who succeeded ousted Khin Nyunt last year, is scheduled to meet with President Macapagal-Arroyo and Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo on Monday during his one-day visit, officials said.

The leaders are expected to discuss ways of boosting bilateral relations, but it was not clear whether imprisoned Burmese opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi would be a topic in the talks.

In an annual summit of Southeast Asian leaders in November last year, Arroyo urged Soe Win to allow Suu Kyi greater representation in the government. She, however, stopped short of calling for Suu Kyi's release.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won elections in 1990, but the ruling military junta has refused to honor the victory. She remains under house arrest in the Burmese capital Yangon.


SOE WIN

Burma (Myanmar) and the Philippines are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and Rangoon's continued detention of Suu Kyi has been an embarrassment for the grouping.

Asean, however, believes in "constructive engagement" in dealing with Burma despite international condemnation.

Soe Win's visit is part of this traditional call on leaders of the Asean member-countries, officials said yesterday.

"It's customary practice for a new leader to call on leaders of Asean member-countries," an official said, but could not give specifics of his one-on-one meetings with Ms Arroyo.

Romulo hinted that the government would appeal anew to the Burmese leader to abide by the "roadmap to democracy" by allowing Suu Kyi to participate in mainstream politics.

"We certainly have been doing our part in reminding Myanmar of its commitment to the roadmap to democracy. In reminding Myanmar that this roadmap to democracy is important in order for us to justify Asean's continued support," he told reporters.

The President met Soe Win on the sidelines of the 10th Asean leaders' summit in Laos in November last year, where she urged him to allow Suu Kyi and the NLD to take part in Burma's national convention.

Soe Win, for his part, said that his government had sent an invitation to Suu Kyi to join the convention, but she declined it.

"At that meeting, the Prime Minister said that it's the hope of the Asean countries that Myanmar will abide by its roadmap to democracy and that part of that roadmap to democracy means that the NLD, as well as Aung San Suu Kyi, would participate in the old party conference that is supposed to be held soon," Romulo said.

"And during the foreign ministers conference, I myself delivered that same message to the foreign minister of Myanmar," he added.

Soe Win had given assurance that the national convention will be followed by a referendum to ratify Burma's constitution.

By assuming the post of prime minister, Soe Win became No. 3 in the leadership behind junta leader Than Shwe and State Peace and Development Council vice chair, Vice-Senior Gen. Maung Aye.

Reports from Xinhua news and AFP

House sets probe of phone firms' rate-fixing

THE HOUSE of Representatives will look into the way cellular phone companies fix the rates they charge subscribers to make sure the public is not overcharged.

Rep. Rodolfo Alfonso II, in a privilege speech, said the inquiry is timed to "encourage competition, prevent monopolist control or cartelization of the industry and protect the welfare of the consumers."

Alfonso took the floor following the filing of separate but similar complaints by Globe and Smart with the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) last month asking NTC to stop Sun Cellular from continuing to practice 24/7 unlimited service.

He said: "If randomly step and all efforts to foil competition in the telecommunications industry and to allow the monopoly by a virtual cartel of telecommunication titans. Congress must step in to protect the welfare of consumers to allow them not only freedom of choice in a competitive market but to ensure their greater access to affordable services from phone services."

In their complaints, Smart and Globe through their smaller subsidiaries, accused Sun of offering very low rates to kill competition and eventually monopolize the industry. They also said Sun's service is below par, which should be reason enough for NTC to stop it.

Alfonso's subsidiary, Pilot, also claimed its rehabilitation would suffer because of Sun's low rates. Pilot's initial assets of P7 billion last year. Sun has been losing since it came into operation almost two years ago because it has been increasing benefit in now still tries to further improve its service.

Globe and Smart control 95 percent of the market and together earned around P72 billion in the past three years alone.

Japan's LDP backs RP on entertainers' visas

By Julie Lobregat-Javellana

TOKYO—Members of Japan's dominant political party are supporting the Philippines' lobby against the new immigration policy setting stricter guidelines on the issuance of visas to Filipinos and other foreign entertainers in view of the clampdown on human trafficking.

The Philippine Ambassador hastings Simon A. said that Japan's new immigration policy was already a done deal and would take effect on March 15 or as announced by Japan's justice ministry.

Japan's new immigration policy requires foreign entertainers intending to work in Japan to have two years of schooling or work experience outside Japan related to the performing arts.

Moratorium

Simon, however, expressed confidence the new policy would not drastically reduce the 80,000 Filipina entertainers presently working in Japan.

The Philippine government through Simon has formally asked the Japanese government for a five-year moratorium on the implementation of the new policy.

Ryki Nakayama, member of the powerful House of Representatives and senior leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, told a joint press conference with Commission on Filipinos Overseas Asst Undersec. Imelda Nicolas Thursday to strongly express his sentiment against the new policy.

Nakayama threatened the policy as based on a "very biased" report of the United States placing Japan and the Philippines in the watchlist of countries engaged in human trafficking. "It's for objective, it's biased, groundless," Nakayama said reported through an interpreter.

Party caucus

Nakayama is poised as a potential candidate for Prime Minister in the September 2006 elections, according to Ang, Kabayanki member Arq. Ang, Kilusang Bayi. Simon lauds Mendoza Jr and former Rotonda Mandaluyong at the Capitol Tokyo Hotel here.

Yesterday, Nakayama called a party caucus of the LDP in its headquarters to come up with a party position against the policy. Two major associations of Japanese promoters—Bungeikai and Tongeikai, are also protesting the new guidelines.

Nakayama cited the significant contribution of the 80,000 Filipina entertainers to Japan in the Philippine economy and said in the Japanese entertainment industry. Filipinas account for 80 percent of the 150,000 foreign entertainers in Japan.

"As a member of the LDP and Congress, I will talk to my colleagues and members of the (House) committees to raise awareness [on the issue]," Nakayama pledged.

He said that while the Japanese government was determined to implement the guidelines, he and other LDP members would try to reverse the policy.

Most unfair

In the press conference, Ang said the Philippine government would support whatever decision the Japanese would make on the entertainment visas.

"However, we honestly think that the policy including the Philippines as among the countries subjecting human trafficking is most unfair," Ang said.

He said the International Labor Organization office in Japan reported that there were only 27 cases of Filipinas reported as victims of human trafficking from 1999 to 2002, with no case at all reported by the Japanese police in 2003.

Ang said the Philippine government is committed to combat human trafficking and protect Filipina entertainers from falling prey to prostitution. But he said the Japanese government and prosecutors should also do their part in curbing human trafficking and prostitution.

Simon told reporters that the Japanese government has agreed not to implement the new policy consistently. It means those who applied by March 14 would be processed based on the old guidelines which allows a confirmation from the Philippine government agencies as sufficient requirement for the issuance of an entertainment visa.

Ang admitted that the policy would affect the Philippine economy because the 80,000 Filipina entertainers send as much as $1 billion in remittance annually and a primary source of $1 billion for the Philippine economy through the "international industry" both as tourist agencies.

The United Organization of Overseas Artist Agencies of Japan (Uniagakai) and the Association of All Japanese Promoters Recruiting Foreign Entertainers (Dangeikai), which employ about 90 percent of the 80,000 Filipina entertainers working in 5,000 clubs here, threatened to implement the guidelines, he said other LDP members of the Japanese Diet and the government to reconsider the implementation of the new policy by March 15.

2-year rule

Under Japan's amended Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, an entertainment visa can be issued only to an applicant who has spent a minimum of two years as a foreign educational institution studying subjects relevant to the type of performance he or she is applying for or a two-year work experience outside Japan.

Ang said for two-year schooling means that Filipina entertainers wanting to go to Japan have to take an arts degree in universities, a tough requirement as entertainers who often come from poor families.

Previously, only a certification by a foreign artist or local government agency such as the latest Record Book or its replacement—the new Artist Accreditation Certificate issued by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, was a requirement for securing an entertainment visa.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Saturday, February 19, 2005
1st Week of Lent

1st Reading: Sir 2:1-13
Gospel: Mk 9:41-50

Jesus said to his disciples, "You have heard that it was said: Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you: anyone, that this I tell you: love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on both the wicked and the good, and he gives rain to both the just and the unjust.

"If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do not even the collectors do as much? And if you are friendly only to your friends, what is so exceptional about that? Do not even the pagans do as much? So your part you shall be righteous and perfect in the way your heavenly Father is righteous and perfect."

Commentary:

We are called to be our answers in the desert to obey and put our practice God's commandments with all our hearts and souls and loves in his voice only. We are God's own people and we are to go to him glory because He has set us apart from the nations, and commanded us to him. We belong with Jesus to our Father and we are to obey the fulfillment of these commands; we are to love our enemies and do good and pray for those who persecute us if we are the children of God. God has His rules and all and we are to obey on all of us. Just and unjust and we are to have the compassion and righteous behavior of our God towards each and—towards all others. O God our Father, rain down your grace and strength upon us so that we might obey with all our hearts and souls, as your Church is also united. Make us love our enemies and remember that we are loving when those around us mistreat us and hate us. Amen.

We have only one must love our enemies and that means to begin with: we cannot kill them. Make us love children and build a place of harbor of all. Amen.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

LABOR LAW (LABOR RELATIONS LAW)—Abandonment—By abandonment is ruin, it is essential: (1) that the employee must have failed to report for work or must have been absent without valid or justifiable reason; and (2) that there must have been a deliberate intention to sever the employer-employee relationship manifested by some overt acts. Both these requisites are not present here. There was no abandonment as the latter is not compatible with constructive dismissal. It is no less than the Constitution which guarantees protection to the workers' security of tenure as a policy of the State. This guarantee is an act of social justice. [Christine Gertrud J. Librado Cleva Manalo, Second Division, Philippine American Life and General Insurance Co. vs Librado, G. R. No. 166083, November 11, 2004]

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Fonacier returns as Eagles battle Maroons

IT has been seven months since Garry Fonacier last suited up for the Ateneo varsity team. But the Eagles are hoping to right its fortunes with the return of the point guard when they battle the University of the Philippines in the Collegiate Championship Cup today at the UST gym.

Fonacier can short his final UAAP season after tearing both the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and medial collateral ligament (MCL) on his left knee in a game against the UP Maroons.

But the MIS-worded UE a last-minute replacement for UAAP champion La Salle Archers, will try to halt Ateneo's comeback when they gun for their third straight win at 4 p.m.

After cashing their third straight victory are the University of Cebu Webmasters, who will battle the rookie-laden University of the East Warriors at 2 p.m.

The Webmasters, one of the two remaining unbeaten teams in the Pharyngitis-Mindanao leg, outlasted the University of San Jose-Recoletos Jaguars, 81-74, last Tuesday.

JAMES TERRY UY-TORRES
7 a.m. — UE vs. University of Cebu
4 p.m. — UP vs. Ateneo

Greville Sabalboal, Lloyd Dolipenos and Kenneth Soriano have been starring for the Cebu contingent.

The UE Warriors, however, are hoping to end Webmasters' bid to the semifinals spoiler treatment intimidated sponsored by Jovan Jesse Communications, Adidas Mobile, Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office, Air21, adidas, Glaxo 600, Wilkins and Pascual Laboratories.

Behind the impressive performances of rookie Mark Barkman and Bonifacio Custodio, the Warriors stunned San Beda's unbeaten reign, 66-53, last Thursday.

The Eagles, whose third-place finish in the UAAP season opened them an automatic bye in the early rounds, are expected to lean on reserves Lil Tonyin, Paolo Bugia and Magnum Rivalmoro.

The UP Maroons, meanwhile, are coming off a 62-61 dismantling of the Letran Knights, with Tuti Almario, Jonas Cervantes, Aby Santos and Nestor Dawal delivering timely performances.

The women of the UE-UC tiff will clash with NCAA runner-up University of the Perpetual, while the winner of the Ateneo-UP match will face UAAP runner-up De La Salle University-on Thursday.

In the first round, UP upset National Capital Region Athletic Association champion Emilio Aguinaldo College, 73-55, while UC blasted West Negros College, 109-83.

Jasmine B. Arao

Morales old and weary, claims Pacquiao trainer

By Edwin L. Laguntay, contributor

ERIK Morales is "old" and, unlike vintage wine, he has turned stale with the years.

This is how Freddie Roach, the mannered trainer who molded Manny Pacquiao into a feared world boxing celebrity, views the 28-year-old Mexican legend.

Pacquiao and Morales clash at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas on March 19 in a much-awaited pay-per-view encounter hyped as "Bring It On."

"We think that's the key to the fight... to go after the guy's body early and make the old man fight every minute of every round," Roach said.

Roach, the 2003 Trainer of the Year, also noted that Morales' workrate will definitely be a factor as the Mexican had been in very punishing wars like the famous trilogy with Marco Antonio Barrera and the hard-nosed wins over Chi Jegha and Eddie Ayala.

Roach's furthest statement for the March 19 fight came a day after Morales downgraded Pacquiao as a one-dimensional fighter.

In an interview with Mexican news service Notimex, the former World Boxing Council champion in three divisions dismissed his opponent as "a one-dimensional boxer who can't move to the left and is easy to hit."

"In my past fights I already faced left-handed boxers and I beat them all by knockout, with the exception of Integrity Morales, which I lost in 12 rounds... My better artillery is my right hand and that's what I will use against left-handed people," Morales said.

He added: "Pacquiao is dangerous because of his speed, but my superior strength will be the determining factor."

Morales, who banged-he has never lost to a left-hander, said Pacquiao cannot adapt to a fight situation.

Roach, however, claimed Morales would be in for a surprise as Pacquiao has been praising perfectly and is expected to wield a new weapon to the unseasoned Mexican.

"He's right where we want him to be," said Roach in an interview with BoxingAsia's Brad Cooney. "He's getting some good sparring in with some good guys like, Juan Lee, Orlando Salido, Marquez... so he's doing really good. He's right on schedule."

As for the qualities that Morales could bring into the ring come fight night, Roach added: "He's got a good southpaw right, a good left upper cut. He makes real nice moves. He can't put an end to them of late, but is a target.

He have to move side to side and use (the quinn's) hand and footspeed.

"Morales is a little down... he's kind of got a long history job and we have to take advantage of that and counter on that. We need to be aware of where he's at athletics."

But if Morales doesn't prepare well for Pacquiao, he would have another hellacious night, Roach quipped.

MORALES: My better artillery is my right hand. →

PACQUIAO: Likely to go for the body first. →

Primero tops killer Baguio bike race

BEHNA, Ilaja's Albert Primero ordered a three-man breakaway early on, then sustained his pace in the mountainous passes of Pangalusian and Kennon roads to ride the Baguio to Baguio 2005 Hooligans Cycling Classic held on Valentine's Day.

Primero, the 20-year-old member of the defending Pagcor Team Baguio and last year's second runner-up in the four Philippine pocket-all from the mountain in the outskirts of Antipolo, La Union to tow provincemate Bernard Lucas and new Pangasinan standout Shewely Carrera.

PRIMERO

Primero pocketed the P50,000 top prize after roughly.

He also received P6,000 for coming first senior in the seventh leg to Bagulin and third in the 200-kilometer race.

The Gumiba-born Primero clocked six hours, 30 minutes and 32.35 seconds for the 200-kilometer race.

New Dangan pride Saul Ibilo, member of the newly formed Pangasinan club Wheki Boys of Asin Garin, arrived two minutes 55 seconds off Primero to win P12,000, a trophy and P3,000 for securing the Kenyon summit in second place.

The 3-foot-11 Shewely Carrera clocked in third, good for P7,000 and a trophy, plus P5,000 for finishing second and third, respectively, at the Inn-minute Sinai Carrera ans nine minutes adrift of Primero.

Another Gumiba standout, Joel Calderon, also a member of the Baguio team, came in fourth worth P5,000 plus P1,000 for finishing third at the Bagulin stop.

Lone Bulusan participant Bruno Lopez Jr. of Pharidel went landed fifth and earned P3,000.

Rounding out the top 10 who received P4,000 each were Lloyd Bayaneo, sixth; Lucas Gacad, seventh; Jaime Bautista, eighth; Jefferson Tabinas, ninth; Lorrie Gacad, 10th.

Eleventh to 20th places received P1,000 each. All finishers were awarded P500 each.

The event was held in anticipation with the celebration of the 2005 Panagbenga, flower festival and sponsored by the Baguio City government headed by the city's chief executive Braulio Yaranon.

Manila, Iloilo, 2 other cities vie for Palaro

By Marc Anthony Reyes

AT LEAST four cities are willing to host the Palarong Pambansa this year but the bid winners must have the Games' most vital requirement—a fully operational sports facility.

The cities of Iligan, Iloilo, Tacloban and Manila are the frontrunners for hosting the Palaro, which took a leave last year to make way for the country's campaigns in the Athens Olympics.

Bid Bonifacio Day Monico Puentevella said that with Senior Undersecretary Jesus Mateo, the host city must have a sports complex that will not require much repairs.

The Palaro normally attracts about 7,000 student-athletes from all over the country.

"We can't afford to make repairs on the new structures, as the ones prepared the sports complex is, the better," said Puentevella.

The port Iligan up front because of its proximity to the world-class Mindanao Golf Course in Tubod, Lanao del Norte, site of the Palaro's last staging in 2003.

The P500 million Tubod venue also made a bid to host the 2005 Southeast Asian Games.

ARROYO

PUENTEVELLA

Puentevella, however, believes that Manila is out of the race and thus rather the Muslim or Mindanao base the battle back to host the event. The usual senators, however, calls for the Games to be held in Luzon this year.

This means that since Mindanao hosted the Games the previous year, the Palaro will return to Luzon, before going back to the Visayas the following year and then back to Luzon again.

But the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex will be undergoing a massive face-lift for the 2005 Southeast Asian Games and will not be ready in time for the Palaro.

Nevertheless, Puentevella said it is up to the Department of Education's regional directors to decide on the venue. Deped regained organizational rights of the Palaro this year from the Philippine Sports Commission, which had run the event the past few years.

President Arroyo has made the Palaro possible this year by approving the release of P20-mil. lost from the President's Social Fund.

Puentevella said the President's donation was her "Valentine's gift" to student-athletes who are undergoing the revival of the Games, which came to elementary and high school students.

Milica

SPECTATOR

AJS Mendoza

THERE is a lady from Oakland who stands out in the 42nd Southern Ladies Open at Pueblo de Oro in Cagayan de Oro City.

That's as far as I am concerned, of course.

No, she's not leading the 54-hole tournament (has been almost 40 female par busters from all over; she's one-stroke close enough in the second round and are to be captured by Joyce Aggie before the day ends today.

She's not, by any stretch of imagination, world-class so far as her playing skills are concerned. That's why the plays in Class D, the lowest bracket in the tournament put up recently by the National Golf Association of the Philippines.

Reaching pros would make a killing just getting her tips on how to grip the club properly.

No, she does not swing like a mountain.

Nor does she look like Jim Furyk or the back swing.

But Milica Sorensen would frown on her swing.

Not to me, Milica Sorensen is a woman. That's as far as my particular of what a true winner is.

Look, how she is well loved by fellow golfers, the grand lady of Philippine golf.

"She's always there in the tank," said Aunt Milica. "She's intelligent and wise in ways of the world."

It is our because Milica has traveled from Luzon to Tawi-Tawi that's why I let her in my book as a winner, although that is no mean feat, considering that she's a foreigner. How many of us have already done that?

"It's been my dream to travel around the Philippines on board a bicycle," Milica said.

In her backyard in her house not far from the Orchard Golf Club in Dasmariñas, Cavite, are three nonagenarians—"two kiddies on my side and one pa."

Oh, how she loves mangoes.

"Elite mango tree of mine had here thousands of fruits during one season," said Milica, whose life is as colorful as, say, Jennifer Lopez's.

"If Lisa was married two hours and three after got divorced on the third hour of her marriage, then she wins," said Milica. "I was married once and within 24 hours of my marriage, I had my divorce."

That marriage was with Melinday Woodley, once an icon in the gymnastics world, who once put up a basketball team in the '90s that were a Conference title in the PBA.

"I don't know where he is now at, though last I heard, he was staying in Australia," said Milica.

But the part in Milica's life that I like best is her love with Arne Asher, the former golf friend of ex-Mayor Mr. Paul McCartney.

"Arne is a dear friend of mine since we were in kindergarten," said Milica, who said she was of Croatian descent but who grew up in London and holds a British passport. "I had brothers with Saul like Cartney when they were eleven-hearts back to the future."

Milica said she also knew Peter (of Oscar & Gordon fame) pretty well. Oscar is Arne Asher's brother.)

"Peter also handled James Taylor," said Milica, who remembers, quite sadly, that Peter's father, a doctor, had died apparently one day and he was never heard of since.

Peter and Peter were part of a band of seven," said Milica. "They were quite a huge hit happy family until their falling apart."

One time, when Milica was working as an office in London, Paul McCartney already a very famous Beatle, came to Milica trying to make up a conversation with Sir Paul, Milica got the check of her life.

"I sensitive must be sounding up while talking to me," Milica quoted Sir Paul McCartney as having said to her.

"Maybe he was just joking?" I said.

"No, no true not," Milica said. "One would smile after saying a joke. But that's no big deal. I wouldn't bother myself with such triviality."

She still remembers Lane Asher "a dear friend."

"Now now owns a cake shop in London that is named simply as Lane Asher Cakes," said Milica, who said Jane Asher was never a fashion model. "She was a child actress. If you see her, give my regards to her."

I will, Milica.

• • •

BIRTHDAY: Here's to Bonet & Bright, who will be the hour today. May your names be as endless as the sea, as mighty as your active and as solid as the rest of a golf ball.

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Rosca

Bush demands Syria leave Lebanon

By Steve Holland

WASHINGTON—President George W. Bush on Thursday demanded Syria pull troops from Lebanon in the wake of the killing of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri and said he would seek support from European leaders next week to put more pressure on Damascus.

"Syria is out of step with the progress being made in the greater Middle East," Bush told a news conference.

He said it was too early to conclude that he had a role in killing Hariri. "I don't know yet, because the investigation is ongoing."

Bush's national security adviser, Stephen Hadley, said the United States objected to Damascus' plans to sell advanced surface-to-air missiles to Syria.

"We have some concerns and we've raised them with the Russian government, and we're confident that Russia will take them into account," Hadley told reporters.

The bomb blast that killed Hariri came at a sensitive time for US policy in the Middle East, as Washington tries to win Europe's support for its efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Washington has used outrage prompted by the assassination of Hariri to intensify pressure it was already bringing on Damascus to withdraw from Lebanon.

Bush said he requested Syria to adhere to last September's UN Security Council resolution 1559, which calls for the removal of the Syrian troops, adding Damascus must promote free and fair elections in Lebanon.

Hariri was killed on Monday and many Lebanese immediately blamed Syria, which maintains a sizeable military and security presence in their country. Damascus denies any involvement, but the event has contributed to a rapid deterioration in US relations with Syria, with Bush announcing the US ambassador for regime consultations.

Bush goes to Brussels next week to meet European Union and State leaders. He said he would use the meetings to rally pressure against Damascus.

"I look forward to working with my European friends on my upcoming trip to talk about how we can work together to condemn the behavior to make criminal decisions," he said.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the administration believed a leadership diplomatic role to try to force Syria to leave Lebanon but noted Bush never took options off the table—code for not ruling out the possibility, however remote, of military action. Reuters

More proof of US prisoner abuse in Afghanistan, Iraq, British newspaper says

LONDON—US military forces in Afghanistan engaged in "widespread Abu Ghraib-style abuse" of detainees, then sought to cover up their wrongdoing, a British newspaper alleged Friday.

The Guardian said it had seen 1,000 pages of evidence from US army investigations in Afghanistan and in Iraq, which were released to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) after suing legal battle.

It said the evidence pointed to prisoner abuse at the main detention center in Bagram, near Kabul, and at a smaller US installation near the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.

"Photographs taken in southern Afghanistan showing US soldiers from the 22nd Infantry Battalion posing in mock executions of blindfolded and bound detainees, were purposely destroyed after the Abu Ghraib scandal to avoid another public outrage, the documents show," the newspaper said.

Abu Ghraib, a detention center outside the Iraqi capital Baghdad, became notorious when photographs emerged last year depicting the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by Iraq US captors.

In Iraq, The Guardian quoted from a statement by an Iraqi who was held in Mosul, the home region of deposed president Saddam Hussein, northwest of the capital.

It said he claimed that a trio of US interrogators in civilian clothes dislocated his arms, put an animal gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger, choked him with a rope, and beat him with a truncheon.

A medical examination by a US military doctor confirmed the detainee's account, "per se torture," the newspaper said. It was found in Camp Bucca last year, the newspaper said.

"It is further proof that the Army is not seriously investigating credible allegations of abuse," Jameel Jaffer, is lawyer for the ACLU, who queried it recently.

Separately The Guardian said that two former prisoners in Afghanistan—a Palestinian and a Jordanian—have made sworn affidavits after they were freed last year from detention in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. AFP

THE HUNTSMASTER of the South Pluto fox hunt gathers his hounds before the hunt in Aldenersley in Derbyshire, central England, Feb. 17. Thousands of Indian British fox-hunting enthusiasts rode out on Thursday to enjoy their ancient pastime for one last time before the ban on hunting with dogs comes into force in England and Wales. REUTERS

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Fox hunts banned in England, Wales

LONDON—A controversial ban on fox hunting and other forms of hunting with dogs came into force in England and Wales on Friday, with enthusiasts saying they were determined to pursue blood sports regardless.

The Countryside Alliance, which failed on Wednesday to get the Court of Appeal to declare the Hunting Act invalid, said 150 hunts were in action Thursday involving perhaps hundreds of thousands of hunters and supporters.

"It's a nonsense, the whole thing," alliance spokesperson Tim Bonner said. "We intend to show that hunting will continue, we intend to hunt this law one way or the other, we're not going away."

The Alliance reported up to 500,000 supporters in cities set to immediately defy the ban, the weekend, he added.

The Hunting Act, which took effect at midnight, was the result of years of campaigning by those who regard fox hunting and other forms of hunting with hounds—a part of British country life for centuries—as cruel and inhumane.

Prepared by Prime Minister Tony Blair's government, the ban was adopted by the House of Commons last November after attempts had been thwarted into overlap to overwrite opposition in the unelected House of Lords.

Many forces have warned that the law, which follows a similar banning ban in Scotland, could prove difficult, if not impossible, to enforce.

Blair supporters say it will be unthinkable to expect police to distinguish between lawful drag hunts, those in which dogs merely chase the scent of a fox or other animal, and illegal hunts.

However, the League Against Cruel Sports, one of several groups that pushed hard for a ban, said its members would gather outside hunting grounds this weekend with video cameras to collect evidence that could be presented in prosecutions.

The government also had some words for would-be huntsmakers, with fraud affairs minister Alun Michael telling hunters they "do not have the right to flout a law that has been passed lawfully by a large majority of democratically-elected members of Parliament."

"The hunting community have always said they are law-abiding members of the community and I expect them to keep to their word," Michael said. AFP

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Blast kills 6 in Thailand

SUNGAI KOLOK, Thailand—The first car bomb to explode in a year-long separatist campaign in Thailand's Muslim south was planned by relatives of banned militant leaders, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said on Friday.

"We know the motive (is) by children of people subject to our current warrant who are pressing the government to stop hunting them, use firefighters or any people linked to foreign groups," Thaksin told reporters in Bangkok.

Thursday night's blast killed six people and wounded more than a dozen in Sungai Kolok, a town close to the Malaysian border.

Gen. Somlak Siewpaiboon, a top army commander in the region, said the Barisan Revolusi Nasional, or National Revolution Front, a group fighting the government, was responsible for the blast.

He gave no other details, but said separatist the Army had detained a Thai Muslim man near the scene of the attack, heading for the nearby border in a stolen car.

But the governor of Narathiwat province, scene of one of the deadliest attacks since the uprising began in January 2004, said he was not so sure there was no foreign involvement.

The attack on Sungai Kolok, a border town that receives tourists with its bars and brothels, was considered by Thais to have entered out, Governor Prachu Tarnit said.

"If they were Thai, they would not have planned such a powerful bomb as this, which is similar to bombs in Iraq," he said.

There has been considerable speculation that Jemaah Islamiyah, the Southeast Asian branch of al-Qaeda, may be involved in the violence that has claimed hundreds of lives in the region.

Militants have let off several motorcycle bombs, triggered by mobile telephone, but security officials said a car bomb was a step up in sophistication.

The car, stolen from an army camp two years ago, was packed near a busy hotel hosting a wedding party. The brilliant bomb inside it, weighing at least 50 kg, wrecked cars, shattered windows and damaged shops over a wide area.

"They aimed for a wider scale of victims. It is an act of terrorism," Prachu said.

Thaksin said that the efforts of the Islamic terror magnified by its phenomenon must power police and a deep with gun ambitions. Reuters

Oceans, Arctic studies show global warming is real

By Maggie Fox

WASHINGTON—A panel of studies looking at the oceans and melting Arctic ice are frozen stare from the doubters: As the planet gets warmer, people are to blame, and the weather is going to suffer, climate experts said on Thursday.

New computer models that look at recent temperatures instead of the atmosphere show the clearest signal yet that global warming is well underway, said Tim Barnett of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Speaking at an annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Barnett said climate models based on air temperatures do not work because most of the evidence for global warming is not over there.

"The real place to look is in the ocean," Barnett told a news conference.

His team used millions of temperature readings made by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to calculate ocean warming.

"The debate over whether or not there is a global warming signal is now over, at least for me," he said.

The report was published just one day after the United Nations Kyoto Protocol took effect, a 141-nation environmental pact the United States government has spurned for several reasons, including stated doubts about whether global warming is occurring and is caused by people.

But more urgent US officials to reconsider.

"Could a climate system simply do that on its own? The answer is clearly no," Barnett said.

He team used 120 government models of solar warming and only one warming, just to see if they could account for the measurements they made. "Not a chance," he said.

And the effects will be felt far and wide. "Anywhere that the major water source is fed by snow... or glacier melt," he said. "The debate is what are we going to do about it."

Other researchers found clear effects on climate and animals.

Beth Carey of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution found that melting ice was changing the water cycle, which in turn affects ocean currents and, ultimately, climate.

"As the Earth warms, its water cycle is changing, being pushed out of kilter," she said. "Ice is a problem everywhere on the planet."

A circulation system called the Ocean Conveyor Belt is in danger of shutting down, she said. The last time that happened, northern Europe suffered enormously cold winters.

She said the changes were already causing droughts in the US West.

Greenland's ice cap, which contains enough ice to raise sea levels globally by 7 meters, is starting to melt and could collapse suddenly, Carey said. Already freshwater is percolating down, lubricating the base and making it more unstable.

Sharon Smith of the University of Miami found melting Arctic ice was taking with it algae that formed an important base of the food supply for a range of animals.

And the disappearing ice shelves meant big animals such as walruses, polar bears and seals were losing their homes.

"In 1997 there was a mass die-off of a bird called the short-tailed shearwater in the Bering Sea," Smith told the news conference. Reuters

SMOKE billows from a power station during sunset in New Delhi Feb. 16. The Kyoto Protocol, a treaty in place to fight global warming, went into force on Wednesday, faced by its backers as a lifeline for the planet amid edging at the United States for staying out. AFP

Charles, Camilla marry on April 8

LONDON—Prince Charles will marry Camilla Parker Bowles in a civil ceremony in Windsor Town Hall on April 8 instead of Windsor Castle because of difficulties over the license, his office said on Thursday.

Clarence House said the move would at least make the wedding more accessible to the public.

"Having the civil ceremony in Windsor Castle would have entailed closing... rooms that are now open to the public," a spokesperson said. "It will also make the occasion more public because the Guildhall is in the town."

The royal couple does not have a license to hold civil marriage ceremonies, and one of the conditions for granting it is that the rooms will be used for such ceremonies regularly.

Instead, the ceremony will be held in the town's 19th century Guildhall, the town hall, followed by a blessing by Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams in St. George's Chapel inside the Castle grounds.

Parker Bowles has an uphill struggle to escape the shadow of the prince's ex-wife, Princess Diana, killed in a Paris car crash in 1997.

By the time she died she and the heir to the throne had already had a messy separation and divorce.

Charles has since gradually risen in public esteem—mainly from the way he has looked after his sons William and Harry.

He and Parker Bowles unexpectedly announced last week their intention to marry, sparking a media frenzy here overseeing that she will not be addressed as queen when Charles becomes king. AP

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Garnett dominates as Wolves lick Cavs

MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota—Alert Sudy Gerstenhorn collected a loose ball in the backcourt, Minnesota assistant Kevin Garnett confronted LeBron James in the seventh as the Timberwolves posted a 96-86 National Basketball Association victory on Thursday.

Jesse Sub scored 26 points and Garnett had eight of his 20 in the final seven minutes to give the Timberwolves a win beating into the midseason all-star break.

Jesse Sub made 9-of-13 shots to power a huge effort from the reserves, who outscored Cleveland's bunch by a staggering 55-6.

Wes Mosley scored 13 points and Eddie Griffin added nine and 10 rebounds off Minnesota's bench and overcompensated for a poor night from the starters.

Garnett was the only Minnesota starter to score in double figures and added 10 rebounds, six assists and three blocks.

He made virtually every big play down the stretch as he scored a decisive 46-foot jumper.

Garnett had a finger roll and jumper on consecutive possessions, giving Minnesota the lead for good at 91-81 with 5:46 to play.

Kirk Hinrich added a jumper 30 seconds later. Jesse Sub was five dozen, but Lucell Sprewell answered with a follow shot, then blocked a shot by Eric Snow.

Griffin was fouled and split the free throws. Garnett somehow got the offensive rebound on the miss, then popped the ball off Cleveland's Drew Gooden as cure the possession. That led to Garnett hold's two free throws for a 99-85 lead in the 1:27 mark.

James made a layup and 3rd Sub made 1-of-2 free shots to cut the deficit to 86-86 with 2:08 remaining before Garnett made a short hallaway jumper with 49 seconds to go. After James made two free throws, Garnett grabbed it with Lee look past between his legs to scoring Griffin, whose layup provided the final margin.

James had 26 points, eight assists and seven rebounds for the Cavaliers, who had won four of their last five games. The 20-year old phenom went to the locker room with a sprained toe in the fourth quarter but later returned. AFP

TIMBERWOLVES' Garnett (21) blocks Cavaliers Drew Gooden during the second half of their NBA game. AP/AFP

Mavericks shade Suns on the road

TORONTO—Michael Finley nailed 31 points and Josh Howard added a career-high 30 to power the Dallas Mavericks to a 110-113 road win over the Phoenix Suns on Thursday.

The defeat meant the Suns missed out on a chance to take sole possession of the lone record in the NBA standings heading into the weekend all-star break.

Dirk Nowitzki had 26 points and 16 rebounds for the Mavericks, who are riding their winning run to four games.

Amare Stoudemire poured in 31 points and snared 12 rebounds for the Suns while Steve Nash, who moved to the Suns from the Mavericks this off season, chipped in with 19 points and 11 assists.

The loss allowed the the Sun Antonio Spurs to share 40-7(.909 pct) with the league's best record (43-12, .782) a game ahead of the Suns. AP

Okafor nixes Rookie Challenge

CHARLOTTE—Bobcats rookie forward Emeka Okafor announced Thursday that he will not participate in the Rookie Challenge during all-star weekend because of a lingering ankle sprain.

Okafor first suffered the injury against the Los Angeles Lakers on Jan. 30 and was quickly put on the injured list and sidelined for five games. He then re-injured the ankle against Miami on Feb. 11. It was his first game after being activated.

Reuters

NASCAR driver Rusty Wallace (2) goes airborne after colliding with Kevin Harvick (29) during the Daytona 500 qualifying race Thursday afternoon at the Daytona International Speedway. AP/AFP

Stewart avoids crash

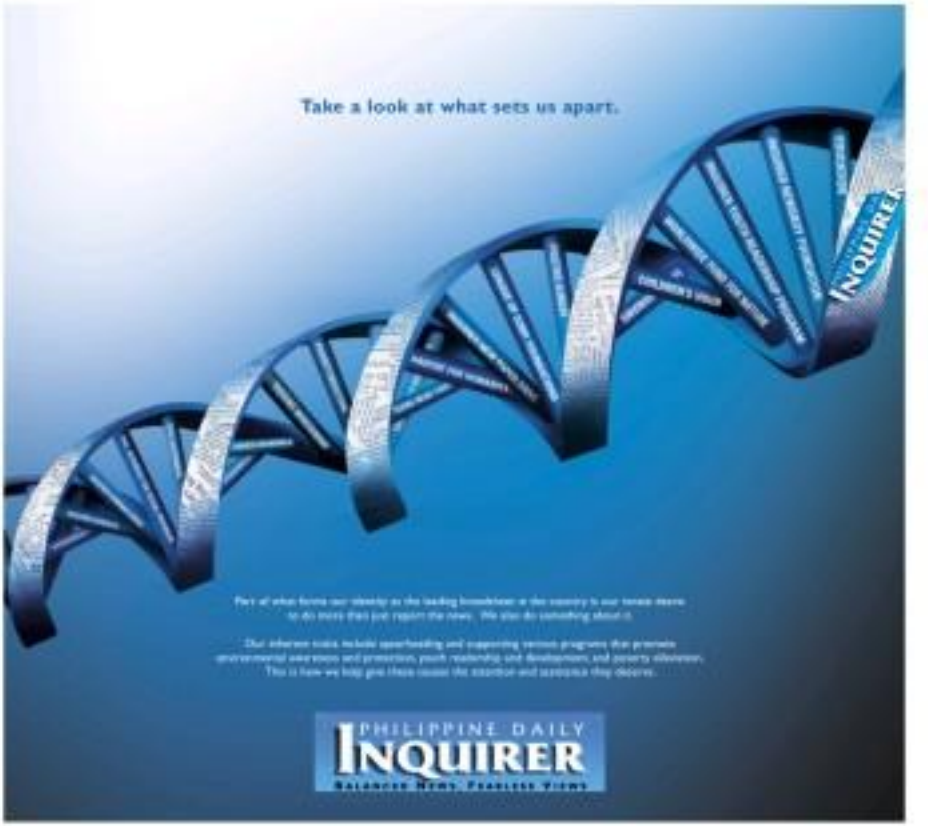
DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.—Tony Stewart avoided a big crash and captured the second Gatorade Duel of at Daytona event at the Daytona International Speedway. The No. 20 Home Depot Chevrolet driver took the checkered flag (1:18) seconds ahead of runner-up Jeff Gordon.

It was the first "Duel" race of the season's owner. He led the final 12 laps after starting 13th on the grid.

"Thanks to all the guys on the Home Depot team," said Stewart. "The Menu Cafe was good today. We were a little on right and we need to work on it before Sunday, but we've got a pretty good race car obviously." Meanwhile, the most of the tagalong was the accident on lap 56.

It was narrowly where Kevin Harvick shot to "bumpdraft" Jimmie Johnson to the middle of the turn 2 and won the leader spinning the the north. Mark Martin, Jimmy Johnson and Ryan Blaney got collected to be most of him determined.

"From the start of the race, Jimmy tried to give me a fire," said Johnson, who led a race-high 28 laps. "He tried to bumpdraft me the corner of the turn. I guess all those years of watching TV and worshipping racing like he says he did, he didn't watch much of it to realize you're not supposed to bumpdraft in a turn.



...vick (29) and Dave Blaney (47) during the second Gatorade Duel 150-mile ...t Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla. AP

..., tops Daytona race

"It's a shame, he just won up as a ... severe good race was.

I hope that Richard Childress... their fans or "Reese 2005 pole-... driving about that, because that is ... ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous." "He's just driving angry," said an ... equally unhappy Hornbrook. "He'll get a load. It was really unsafed for what happened out there. Every driver's racing and he's trying to ... people around to the corners." After finishing over his wrangled, ... car, Harvick was asked if he could possibly win his first Daytona 500 in his final start. "Absolutely not! I was ... serious," Kevin Lepage, Mark to Bowe Jr. and Dave Biggs completed the top five.

In the race within the race, Elliott Sadler and Lepage were the top two finishers of nine drivers who were not already qualified for the Daytona 500 and instead participated in a pole ... on Sunday's starting grid.

Rain forces will start on the pole for Sunday's 47th running of the Daytona 500 which is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. est. Jones will start on the outside of Earnhardt, assuming he can still turn today's ...

Michael Waltrip and Dewayne will start in row two, back toward for today's ... Meanwhile Dale Earnhardt Jr., the defending Daytona 500 champion, will fall farther ... will start in row three. Reuters

Vintage Federer routs Swiss teen

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands—Roger Federer was once again in vintage form as he swept aside Swiss teenager Stanislas Wawrinka, 6-1 6-4, in the second round of the World Indoor Tennis ... on Thursday.

Former Australian Open champion Thomas Johansson continued his resurgence by conquering his ... countryman Marc Rosset, 6-4, 6-4.

Ranked 138 places above his opponent, top seed Federer showed no signs of the groin problem ... during his opening match as he marched into the last eight for the sixth consecutive ... title.

The win also put him one match away from a possible semi-final showdown with Marcos Baghdatis, who beat Robin ... in the quarterfinals for the ... year.

Third seed Hewitt crashed out of the ... with a 6-4 6-1 loss over Frenchman Michael Llodra.

Qualifier Wawrinka, who earned ... the biggest win of his career to ... previous, could ... Federer in ... Sebastien Grosjean, barely ... what just hit him in a ... against Rosset or handing him ... defeats.

"It was ... for ... He ... and ... I ... I ... I

INQUIRER

OPINION

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Overkill alert

THE VALENTINE'S Day bombings have resulted in a chorus of protests against terrorism. They have achieved what their perpetrators did not expect: a rousing call against extremism and its perpetrators. They have consolidated the consensus among peace-loving people that terrorism is malice masquerading as political conviction. Malevolence has a face, and it is the face of the Valentine barabols.

EDITORIAL But government risks meddling with the face of the misdirection of malevolence when it over-reacts. It has not achieved that dubious distinction yet. But its propensity for shotgun investigation—"blame everyone first before an honest-to-goodness inquiry"—portfigures that.

It is easy to blame, for example, the so-called renegade factions of the Moro National Liberation Front which initiated several military outposts in Basilan last week, killing several soldiers, generally succeeding to a fly in the ointment in the run-up to the resumption of talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. (The MILF is the original MNLF breakaway faction that has somehow gotten the upper hand in claiming the position of spokesman for the Muslim secessionist movement in Mindanao.) It is likewise easy to blame the Abu Sayyaf and its allies in the Jemaah Islamiyah. After all, the Abu Sayyaf and the JI have been behind some of the most notorious terrorist attacks in the last several years. And didn't Abu Solaiman, the self-styled Abu Sayyaf spokesman, claim an radio responsibility for the bombings?

What is surprising is that government and the military have not been too resolute in assigning blame to the extremists or the secessionist groups. This may be so because it had written off these groups a long time ago. The bombings could have been so calculated as to constitute a slap in the face of a government that might have spoken too soon, who knows? If so, then one could only imagine government's shock.

The worse shock, of course, is that the government had been caught flat-footed. Despite billions of pesos in intelligence funds, the military failed to prevent the bombings or anticipate the boldness of their design and execution. This country has the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency that does not seem to coordinate all the disparate and often wrangling intelligence agencies, whether in military or civilian offices. The well-coordinated bombings last Monday should show who has a better sense of coordination.

Since the government would assign the blame earlier on itself or its enemies (because it has long written them off and to name them would conjure them back from the tomb where the state authorities have consigned them in what were comments to a virtual, and hence, spurious, hell), then it is most likely it would pin the blame on the most convenient scapegoats: the Muslim population. Already several imams and heads of Muslim communities have sounded the alarm that the bombings would surely lead to graver and more intense persecution of Muslims whose only sin is to have the same religion as the extremists. It seems to have been made a standard in the military and police rules of engagement that the first step in a post-bombing scenario is a dragnet of Muslims. Many people have been the victims of summary arrests only because they pray to Allah.

The government and the military should not take lightly its often knee-jerk reactions to bombings. The reaction is nearly always wholesale anti-Muslim persecution. And this is by no means merely local. Even foreigners have felt prejudiced by summary and strong-arm tactics that do not discern and distinguish. Many Middle Eastern investors and businessmen, for example, have left the Philippines. Even Indians, who are mostly Hindus, have complained that they are being harassed by law enforcers just because they look like people from the Middle East. Those foreigners are good investors and hardworking, disciplined and peace-loving. Some of them have intermarried with Filipinos and have considered the Philippines their new home. They have never failed in condemning terrorism, but overreacting law enforcers are making their lives hell.

In the wake of the Valentine's Day attacks, there has been an unprecedented public condemnation of terrorism and support for government initiatives to deal with the extremists decisively. But the decisiveness should be characterized by intelligence and discernment. The call to action is clear: government should respond to terrorism firmly, and it can only do so by not creating more enemies.

Fake medicines

SEPARATE OPINION

Jaegwon A. Cruz

MEDICINES are essential to the maintenance of health and the restoration of life in case workers. Even the costliest relief items to the poorest day sculptures and communities. Drugs have especially become necessary in the modern world with the invasion of new and fatal afflictions for which like the common cold, advances in science have yet to find a cure.

People who consider themselves healthy appear that medicines are a necessity but fortunately not for them. It is a fact of life that does not directly affect them and so does not cause them needless worry. It is only when they succumb to the hospitals who or their loves ones are found, or their loves who is here or ruse, or they lose their jobs or lucky cash, that they accept the necessity of their existence. That is when they decide to think of doctors and, of course, medicines.

Television and radio commercials have doused ear-deaf audience die impressions and repeating dominate of the issues they are advertising. These come one here at least made to breathe sometimes, which to a extent that should be encouraged and developed. Many people have abandoned the superstitious practices and ineffectual necessary they used to depend on and have come to rely on the fact that they are on modern well researched remedies for the alleviation of their ailments.

The problem, however, is that some of these government approved medicines are, because of their effects, being linked to many injurious consequences to the population of the land mass. The lower price of these counterfeit drugs makes them attractive to unsuspecting buyers who are always looking for a bargain, particularly during these such occupied times. Little do they realize that this time economy may have an adverse and sometimes even fatal impact upon their health.

Counterfeit medicines are defined as those manufactured by unscrupulous persons to imitate and compete with genuine medicines duly tested and approved by the government. According to Other, one of the leading drug companies in the country, said fakes may include products labeled to look like the genuine medicines but do not contain the correct kind and amount of ingredients, or may have expired, or may have been illegally established, such of which diseases may cause the risk of allergic or dangerous interactions with other medicines.

Other disputes the difficulty of telling the difference between real and fake medicines because counterfeit medicines are copied to make them look like the original. Thinking that these medicines can be trusted, patients, physicians and other medical practitioners often do not even suspect that there is anything wrong with the pill such others they use" that may cost poor themselves to possible harmful effects.

An unapproved imported medicine is also considered counterfeit if there is a counterpart registered branded or generic medicine approved by the Bureau of Food and Drugs. Consumers should carefully examine the packaging and labeling of the medicines they buy and be suspicious if the colors such design materials or if the medicine does not have a generic name.

"Nearly all medicines are being counterfeited," the drug company adds. "These include [medicines everyday medicines like vitamins as well as life-saving ones like antibiotics and antihypertensives." The World Health Organization estimates that the incidence of this drugs continues to possess of the world market. The Department of Health says that 10 percent of medicines in the Philippines are counterfeit.

Stopping the need to combat this serious threat to the health of our people, the Coalition Against Fake Medicines was launched recently under the leadership of the Department of Health as the primary regulatory agency in charge of medicines. It will be supported by the Department of Trade and Industry, which will monitor consumer complaints and control the issuance of business permit to be granted to drug stores within the prohibited products. The Department of Justice, also a principal partner, will undertake the prosecution of all persons or companies suspected of the offense.

The private members of the Coalition are the Philippine Medical Association, the Philippine Chain Drugstores (the CMA, 7 Brookstone Network, Mercury Drug Corporation, the Drugstores Association of the Philippines, Quality Pharma Corporation, and Pharr, which supplied the information for the article through its official publications. Healthlink. Each of these members of the Coalition Against Counterfeit to make the campaign against pirated drugs a successful one all effort to achieve its principle objective of preserving the nation's health.

The intended beneficiaries of the Coalition have a stake in its success and we should give it our support. Indeed, the CMA's Brookstone Network's promotion of the above campaign in its newsletter should give it praiseworthy example for the rest of the country to follow. Fake medicines can strain the growth of our race and undermine the physical well-being of our people, especially our children. Let us not tolerate can threaten health with our indifference to the problem as we should have today.

My kind of Filipinos

GET REAL

Sallie Collao-Hammond

ONE of the noteworthy results of the Palm Beach County ballot fiasco in the November 2000 election was the almost 100-percent vote-tally accuracy the Filipino had achieved to be selected—designed with the comments, "This country is hopeless," with 20 percent undecided and only a relatively small minority (36 percent) agreeing, a significantly smaller proportion than only a majority (54 percent) also disagreed with the statement, "It is even only possible, I would migrate to another country and live there," with 19 percent undecided, and a larger minority (28 percent) agreeing.

Then each Filipino's own short-term fate, and the citizens is devoted to Chito and Rhanie Bonanza, who are managers of this monastery and whose services show how lengthy they have their country and how much they are willing to do to make it a better place to live in.

Chito and Rhanie's are not your average PhilAmerican couple. Both have PhDs in Theoretical Physics (Chito from one of New York, Albany) and have distinguished themselves in the field, in the Philippines and abroad, with an international experience in Pacific Rim countries. Chito and Rhan Marie Antolyn (short-cut: one what more one, but they sound impressive). Their names appear as authors or co-authors in the Journal of Mathematical Physics and other international journals. Both were in the faculty (Chito was chairman) of the National Institute of Physics, University of the Philippines, and both earned "Outstanding Teacher" awards when they were in UP.

Chito's story is unique in the sense that after they left UP for greener pastures abroad. With their qualifications, they could work practically anywhere in the developed world, or salaries at least 10 times the local rates. But if that was what happened, they may would have been among the most Filipinos who joined the brain drain.

Money was not their object. They were hired as Argus Herbal, [population 30,000] to set up the Central Visayas Institute Foundation with two overnight dropouts from the Research Center for Theoretical Physics (RCTP), serving Dumaguete and Mandaue, and the Central Visayas Institute Foundation (CVIF) high school, originally set up 10 years before by Chito' grandfather, which was floundering. These pioneers saw an investment in human capital, more precisely human capital development. It was payback time—to the country they were.

How the RCTP is flourishing should be no surprise, given the backgrounds of the founders. It regularly conducts seminars and workshops for the transfer of technology and knowledge. It helps maintenance of higher learning in Visayas and Mindanao. It support their research and teaching capabilities, as well as their academic properties, and hosts international conferences which have attracted some of the best physicists in the world, including Nobel laureates. The Rhandies recently (in July) won the Philippine government for these efforts.

But if the Bonanzas' work in RCTP serves as beacon for physics research and training, their work in CVIF is enabling scores in the Philippine science high school system. The school has been visited by educators from all over the country (the most recent being the contingent of Perelia, De La Salle and Immaculate Conception academies), and the formulas there have served to expound on what they are doing under the sponsorship of the Fund for Assistance to Private Education.

Why? Because in the course of four years of school administration [principal, dean(s), teaching / General Science, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Mathematics] and by firsthand experience, they realized that the traditional teaching methods developed in the West were not efficient in the current Philippine context. So they started their own program called the DYP Dynamic Learning Program (CDP Program, for short) which is suitable for the large classes common in the Philippines, requires a smaller number of textbooks, needs fewer science equipment, reduces teaching preparation requirements, is less dependent on the abilities and personalities of teachers, has built-in checks of dysfunctional behavior observed in Filipinos (which they list as a culture of dependency, underdeveloped sense of honesty, less tendency of quality and the pseudo as 'our attitude, flawed priorities, and a poor concept of time and discipline in keeping schedules). In short, a program that addresses the problems and adverse conditions existing in the country.

Said per this, dollar the students have an homework under the DYP Program (I hope to write more about this in another column).

Thus the program is succeeding can be judged from what the Bonanzas call external checks. One is that for the first time in their school's history, students passed the UP College Admission Test very pass in a row: first year of [] who took it; in 2003, and four in 2004 (also eight went without one passed). Another is that in the Mathematical Challenge for Filipino Kids Training Program conducted by the Mathematics Trainers Guild (MTG) of the Philippines, the number of CDP qualifiers rose from one to eight in 10 since 2002—with two of them ranking second and third overall, outranking their counterparts from Ateneo, Xavier, etc.

Here's the performance for a rural high school where almost half of the students and a parent or guardian who did not get past high school? Certainly not that of the cream of the crop students essentially feeding into the Research Center for Theoretical Physics. And they are working hard to realize their dreams.

They are my kind of Filipinos.

Putting on a brave face

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cavanaugh

MALACAÑANG has sought to differentiate itself from the Cabinet members who have to dance to the tune of their personal holdings in private firms before they can occupy their posts and those serving pro bono in an advisory capacity. It could claim the latter don't have to give up their work in private corporations and reinforce a conflict of interests in their inaction. This clarification was allowed yesterday by the Palace after former Solicitor General Frank Chavez questioned before the Ombudsman former Foreign Secretary and business executive Roberto Romulo's keeping the post of presidential adviser for investment concerns despite his work.

* * *

Romulo himself has defended his advisory post, which carries no salary and "formal office," by stressing "the long traditions and practices of the various presidents in the past of tapping personages from the private sector and civil society to serve as non-salaried advisers and members of presidential councils and task forces." He named the "capital formation" under EB laws, between "public officers" and "advisers," e.g., the former can sign legal documents on behalf of government, while the latter cannot.

Indeed, one recalls the appointment of distinguished business leaders like Washington Sycip and Alfonso Yuchengco to various boards, councils and commissions, and the famous Bonanguit dinners between the International Board of Advisers, apparently the idea of various presidents, including Fidel Ramos, has been to avail of the advice and experience of these persons in matters on behalf of government, while he/she remains on behalf of private concerns.

Indeed, one recalls the appointment of distinguished business leaders like Washington Sycip and Alfonso Yuchengco to various boards, councils and commissions, and the famous Bonanguit dinners between the International Board of Advisers, apparently the idea of various presidents, including Fidel Ramos, has been to avail of the advice and experience of these persons in matters on behalf of government, while he/she remains on behalf of private concerns.

* * *

Youth welfare not gov't priority

EDSA' asked two all more by the young Tales in the laundry soap ad. He was an epitome of youth, bursting with energy and pride, as it 'a modern Filipino' (pwa ngayon) and, surely, a long way to go. We have lots of Tales who aspire for education, in the literal or allegorical sense, but the problem of affording their parents' suffering, is the hope of providing their own family with a better life in the future.

After all her unprecedented promises for the youth, President Macapagal-Arroyo and her pack of rosetype lawmakers now deliver to the youth a stifling 15.48 per cent of the national budget this year for public education. This will hardly make a difference in the dismal condition of our education system, which is currently riding with a shortage of 62,000 teachers, 56,000 classrooms, 58 percent low electricity and 27 percent zero ventilation. The budget will see even some close to meeting the needs of Mr. Arroyo's so-called schedule. She said that, based on the records of the Philippine Health Insurance Corp., there are about 7 million poor Philhealth-enrolled families. Sending 7 million poor children to school will cost Phl billion to P76 billion. This already accounts for more than half of the education budget.

In addition, an austerity measure of the President, which will merge colleges and state universities, from the progress of a college education for the majority of the Filipino youth. The college drop-out rate, which stood at 73 percent as of last year, will definitely skyrocket, while the streams for a college degree of many youth will be limited down the aisles.

To suffer more will be the children in rural areas, including indigenous children, in hardly a whisker from the education budget teachers their communities. Some make do with the "multi-grade system," in which as much as three grade levels (1-3 or 4-6) are merged in a single class under one "shared" teacher. With expiry accounts and unmated fees, many of them cross two mountains to reach their schools, which become inaccessible during harsh weather conditions. Some, due to poverty, are to help out in their families' farm instead of going to school.

Already there are about 3.7 million children, aged 7 to 12 years old, who are out of school, deprived of their right to education. And they will never see four or even a dispirited 2006 school because of the worsening economic crisis that the government is trying to solve by reducing social services and making food for people harder to earn.

What will happen to Erin and many of our promising youth with our educational system coming and deteriorating? Youth welfare is not a priority of the government.

What happens then to the "Tales of the world," where the logo cap left to the Filipino youth by the country's leadership in face of low, low priorities, stolen dreams and a bleak future?

—MARIA LIZ TADEL
Kalusugan Para sa Sambayanang Pilipino Alay Diwa, Polytechnic University of the Philippines and Adamson University, Sampaloc Manila, Quezon City

Illegal logging vs timber harvesting

A WORLD like to clarify some of the issues in the article titled "Logging did not cause calamity, says expert" (PDI, 2/16/05).

1. The "logging" referred to was scientific pollard harvesting, a way of harvesting trees to provide wood and light for the growth in area of growing seedlings. If conservable done, only mature trees are harvested. Illegal logging, on the other hand, causes serious loss.

The article states that "logging, whether legal or illegal, is definitely not the cause of the landslides and floods that happened in Quezon." Illegal logging cannot be considered as a cause, in combination with other causes—such as geology, hydrology, design, and land administration—it could have helped trigger the landslides.

2. The Forestry Inst Forest Conservation Center (FDC) is set to conduct a study in Real and Infanta, Quezon, and Dingalan, Aurora. The study will be done in partnership with the community members in the conduct of policy research. Any conclusions made at this point on the incident would have no basis and, would run counter to the scientific and objective process of doing research. Therefore, there should not be any premature conclusions in the manner that had been summed up in two pages.

The paper mentioned in the article in part of a series of information materials on logging and responsible forest management, which is for dissemination. The dean of the College of Forestry and Natural Resources (CFNR) has not cited a 10-man investigation team.

3. The paper mentioned is not a product of two collaborators in the FDC and faculty members of the college. The CFNR conducted a first attending discussion on the incident which was also attended by its students. Issues were raised and suggestions were made on how the college could give more focus. There was also a clarity of supervision based on related scientific and normative activities of faculty members.

4. No paper will be presented to either the environment secretary or the House of Representatives committee.

5. The FDC, which is based at the CFNR, is mandated to conduct good research in forestry and, to develop, or help develop, an effective mechanism for forestry policy formulation and implementation.

6. Excerpts for the portraits lifted from the paper titled "Sustainable forest management is what the Philippine forests need," all other comments are my personal views.

—ELEUTO O. PELAEZ, director, Forestry Development Center, College of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of the Philippines Los Baños College, Laguna

LETTERS

'Why do they stick with Erap?

FORMER PRESIDENT Estrada's **arms policies**, a commission of lies as long in a row draws—watch the unsurprising case of Ricardo Reed-ers, Ferando Morales, etc.—has rendered its working more than just that," is palsafe.

It is incomprehensible why these people, intelligent as they are, cannot detach themselves from a corrupt and disgraced politician and link exciting the stigma of also being morally corrupt because of his association.

Also, I am trying to understand Nene Pimentel by reading up on Erap's lawyer, helping the fight to save Erap from going to prison, in the same way that a lawyer, through skillful legal maneuverings, saved the infamous American gangster Al Capone from going to prison for his heinous crimes. Capone though ended up in prison on a minor uncaptioned charge of tax evasion. In the end, bothered by his conscience, the lawyer came over with the truth and, for that, was killed by Capone's men. I do not wish this to happen to Senator Pimentel.

Erap's "road show" in Hong Kong proves how dinky rich the man still is (thanks to the Atlantic accounts, bids, and deals in the only plausible reason I can see why those once responsible guys stick to with Erap. Saving a man from coming from prison to free the irrepressibly class for probably believes their association will bring him to save his neck. To conclude, everything else is boring in bill with mystery.

Not surprisingly, the country is now No. 2 in the world in corruption, and it begins from the top of the underground.

—CESAR M. DELOS REYES, cesdlreyes@manila.com.ph

Dead set on cleaning up AFP

I felt writing in response to the remarks of former Supreme Court justice Isagani A. Cruz..."In aid of grandstanding." (PDI, 1/5/05).

At least of the visions of "impeachers" Congress on National Defense and Security L...and the members of my community—will not stop working to root out graft and corruption within the armed forces of the Philippines, in spite of accusations by some women that we are merely grandstanding.

Considering the magnitude of the problem, the committees to be assigned to continue the inquiry in order to identify the sources of graft corruption in the public will know and we can craft the remedial legislation.

Pursuing our the truth is an important exercise of legislative oversight in a manner democracy as eloquently defined by Woodrow Wilson: "It is the proper duty of a representative body to look diligently into every affair of the government and to talk much about what it sees. It is meant to be the eyes and the voice, and to embody the wisdom and will of its constituents. Unless Congress have and use every means of acquainting itself with the acts and the dispositions of the administrative agents of the government, the country must be helpless to know how it is being served... The informing function of the Congress should be performed even to its legal exercise function."

I trust that one of your learned columnists, the renowned dean of the UP College of Law, Raul Pangalangan, obviously agrees with

Blame Makati for traffic mess

MAKATI Mayor Jejomar Binay should not blame the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority for the traffic mess in the Kalayaan-CP Intersection.

Traffic was almost smooth when the U-turn slots were in place. But because Binay does not want to be overshadowed by the creativity of the incumbent MMDA chair, Bayani Fernando, he challenges and changes everything that the MMDA implements.

When the Committee on National Defense is doing what the senate in your Oct. 20, 2004 issue of the issues: "Significantly, when committee to write an illustrative part is prime, it may take a highly political body like Congress...and not the courts acting alone—to carry through an investigation. This rationale may yet redeem the much maligned power of congressional inquiry. Critics have often parodied these 'inquiries in aid of legislation.' Perhaps now they must grant our congressmen a little more credit. ...

"Some critics limit our congressmen for 'grandstanding' during the Garcia hearings. I disagree. It takes not elevated legislators to take our military to task. But the President, who is also responsible for the present anarchy and decadence who are heads of the executive department, has the power to call an elected members and deputies upon the President's political fortunes. And, for for a few shining moments, not the courts or this. They are all to refined, their countenances too formal, their positions so tenured. They are incapable of seeing because they avoid on dangerous ground taken they inquire into power of arms. Ferdinand Marcos' rule by martial law found many supreme votes, and it took the Edsa People Power 1 revolt to split them asunder."

The Committee on National Defense and Security will remain proactive in doing our part in cleaning up the AFP.

—SEN ROLANDO G. BIAZON, 2nd District, Pasay City

Binay did nothing when he saw an MMDA chair during Erap's time. In fact, he has done nothing for Makati also. Sayang ang oras ng mga motorista kung Makati ang dadaanan ng Commonwealth Avenue. Kung hindi lang sa mga kaibigan ni Binay na nakatira sa Commonwealth Ave. ang hindi nagrereklamo sa traffic dito, that's why the city has a big income).

—RICARDO VALERIO, rick_par@yahoo.com

Across the NATION

Bus fire kills 5, hurts 20 in Palawan

By Geraldfred Tejos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau
and Greg Bathan-ao, PDI Central Luzon Desk

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY—Five people died and at least 20 others were injured when a passenger bus caught fire near Barangay Tanlad, Narra, Palawan yesterday morning, according to Narra mayor Lucy Demanda.

A follow-up police report said four of the casualties died on the spot while one was dead on arrival at the Narra District Hospital.

Three of the dead were children while two were adults.

Only John Jan Nonato, 5, and Raymund Ona, 3, were identified by their mothers, the report added.

The wounded victims were rushed to the Narra District Hospital.

Some had been transferred to the provincial hospital.

Senior Supt. Reynaldo Lubiano, Palawan provincial police director, said there was no foul play in the accident, adding that the 15 minute fire area caused by faulty electrical wiring and the presence of grains of plastic balloons on top of the bus engine caused.

The Puerto Royale Express bus No. 383 left this city at about 9 a.m. for Barangay Tanabing, Quezon District, Puerto Princesa City when the fire, the police report added.

In Manitoba, Staines, a mild explosion that left a big hole in the concrete base of the transmission transformer of the National Transmission Corp. (Transco) rocked the Batasan Encomio Zone on Thursday midnight.

Police, however, said there was no casualty from the explosion at the Transco sub-station 2 on 11th Avenue and Mindanao Avenue in the SEZ.

Supt. Arnold Umbrano, Batasan police deputy director for operations, said the suspect used improvised explosive materials as shown by the pieces of plastic used as wrapper for the bomb.

"At any rate, we gathered some available materials from the explosion scene for laboratory testing to determine the type of explosive material used in this incident," he said. Cinamco said there was no security guard assigned to the Transco sub-station, during the attack. When the facility was still managed by the National Power Corp. (Napocor), security guards were assigned to that area.

Generoso said the other Napocor facilities in the SEZ are secured.

COURAGE
Two government soldiers gesture after boarding a military truck that will bring them to the frontlines in the war against an armed group of followers of jailed Moro leader Nur Misuari.

Suspect in trading of counterfeit medicines arrested

By Lelia B. Salaverria

A FORMER medical representative turned suspected dealer of fake medicines was arrested in a buy-bust operation that also led to the seizure of counterfeit and expired drugs with a market value of P5 million.

Suspect Pedro Guevarra, a 45-year-old resident of San Fernando City in Pampanga, was arrested in the same city by agents of the National Bureau of Investigation's National Capital Region-Illicit Drugs task force members of the Tri-Zone Gang.

Investigators said that Guevarra had been selling counterfeit-illicit capsules packaged as antibiotics or vitamins, and different kinds of expired medicines whose containers were scraped clean to erase the dates.

Some of the suspect medicines allegedly came from Manila or Manila, which they were supposed to be turned but were instead brought to Pampanga. Some of the capsules, on the other hand, were from Bangkok, Thailand, said Jun Bautista, executive officer of the NBI-NCR.

Among the counterfeit medicines seized from Guevarra were cough syrups, oral hydration salts, the erectile dysfunction drug Viagra, birth control pills and anti-flu tablets.

Guevarra had allegedly been in the business of selling the fake drugs for six years before he was found out. He supposedly sold the drugs at a cheaper price than real medicines.

But he said yesterday that the contraband seized from him were used for training dogs and not for the drugs.

Upon learning of the suspect's illegal operation, the NBI decided to conduct a buy-bust operation, and a test buy was conducted to get a sample of the drugs. A confidential from the NBI's clients showed the medicines initially brought from Guevarra were fake and counterfeit medicines.

Later, the NBI's poseur-buyers arranged to buy P500,000 worth of various medicines from the suspect.

Guevarra was arrested after the NBI agent handed over the money to him. Also seized from him were marked bills and a branded Isuzu van. The suspect also failed to present a license to distribute the medicines.

Illegal cutting, trade of narra continues in Vizcaya

SAN MARIANO, Isabela Province—Agents of the National Bureau of Investigation on Friday confiscated a lot of illegally cut narra, the third shipment of illegal logs to be intercepted by lawmen here in a week.

The agents arrested three men while they were transporting about four cubic meters of handled sawn planks on the national highway in Barangay Ramos from Santa Fe in Luzon.

Lower Diversion Binalog NBI district chief here, identified the suspects as truck driver Nemin Maldad, and his helpers, Ferdinand Allungan and Marlon Arce.

The agents intercepted the roundabout after they created a tip-off from an informant on the truck's route.

The suspects presented a certification of attendance, transport agreement and a permit to transport issued by Fernando Bellarello, community environment and natural resources officer (Cenro) based in Cabarroguis, Quirino.

"[The suspects] presented to us documents that supposedly covered the shipment but we found those to be [irregular]," Binalog said.

Documents showed that the narra shipment, said to be owned by one Mila Rivarosa, came from Pinaweln and would be delivered to a furniture shop in Pinoli, Bulacan.

Rivarosa, however, denied that the confiscated narra planks were illegally harvested.

"Why did the DENR [Department of Environment and Natural Resources] issue us permits if those were illegal?" she said.

"We are not involved. The [Cenro] where to stand. If the DENR did not give us all those permits, we would not have invested so much on this business only to incur losses later [due to confiscation]," she said.

Binalog said: "The owner was claiming that these were garden-variety old trees growing, but judging by the size of the planks, we are not convinced. We believe these were derived from trees that were killed," he said.

He said they would summon the DENR officials to explain the issuance of the supposed permits, noting that the provisional validation of narra shipments, despite the apparent deficiencies, were also accompanied with DENR-issued documents. Melvin Gascon, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Data manipulated to justify use of coal plants, Ilonggo groups say

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—Groups opposing applications to put up coal-fired plants on Panay Island are seeking a House investigation of accusations that the energy department manipulated data to justify the projects.

The Responsible Bonggat for Sustainable Energy (Bise), an alliance of more than 50 environmental groups and non-government organizations, said they would ask representatives of Iloilo's lone congressional district and party-list organizations to conduct an investigation of the processes in the planning of regional power development and diversification projects.

They want legislators to investigate the plans of Mirant Global to put up a 300-mw coal-fired plant in Barotac Viejo town, 66.4 km north of here, and the proposal of SMC Holdings Inc. to construct another plant in Concepcion town, 111 km north of Iloilo City.

In a statement, the groups accused the Department of Energy of "manipulating data" to project an impending power crisis in Panay by 2007 and to push for coal-fired power plants.

But said the data presented by energy officials during a power summit here in November last year were inconsistent with the DOE Power Development Plan (PDP) of 2004-2013 that projects an average surplus of 224 mw for Panay Island.

The group said the entry of coal plants contradicts the Western Visayas Regional Development Plan for 2001-2015, which aims to tap indigenous and renewable sources of energy and reduce dependence on imported fuel.

Bise said that because of the environmental projection, the construction of two coal plants would result in a surplus of electricity on the island. This would mean higher electricity rates because consumers have to pay even for the unused electricity they used.

The groups said there are alternative sources of energy on the island that the government and private investors could tap like geothermal, wind, hydro and biomass.

But George Unico, secretary-treasurer for Iloilo, said there were finally any investors interested to develop existing renewable sources of energy in Panay that could solve the projected energy supply deficit.

He said the offers they received only included plans of a farmers firm to develop a small hydroelectric power plant in Alimodian, geothermal and biogas-fuel power energy generating plants on Negros Island.

Unico, who was here during a forum on energy issues on Wednesday, said coal-fired plants or those run by biofuel fuel were "the most acceptable option left for the region" because of lack of alternative sources. He said of the two, coal-fired is the cheaper and more efficient.

The putting up of additional base-load plants here become urgent because of the increase in tourism-related activities in Panay and Boracay.

SOUTHERN LADIES

Agojo virtual champion with second straight 66

By Al S. Montoya

GALAXIE 18, DIKI CITY—Jennie Agojo, whose puny appearance belies her killer instinct on and off the tee, scored a cute second straight 6-under-par 66 yesterday to virtually win the 42nd Southern Ladies Open at Diokno de Oro here.

The 18-year old Agojo made seven birdies against a lone bogey leaving the field practically fighting for crumbs as she appeared set to win it with her imposing 12-point margin.

"I am really surprised at the way I am playing," said Agojo of her back-to-back 66s. "It's like a joke."

Only 16 holes separate Agojo from claiming the Southern Ladies Open in her first try, leading 1999 champion Constancia Villaman by 12 points to the Malaver-sawing upstart that also has points on a birdie, three eagles and four to a bogey.

"Sir, I'm not going for Heidi's (Chua) record," said Agojo. "I will just play my natural game tomorrow and if it should happen that I would set a new record, I'd be very grateful."

At a rookie in 2008, Chua, now a professional, won this tournament with a 72-under-par total to establish the biggest winning margin in the annual tournament that was begun in 1963 by the National Golf Association of the Philippines.

Villaruman, hitching a golden-tipped eye (things, draw is P1 and, settling her opening-day 71, totaled 308 points, 12 points behind Agojo's tournament-leading 320 in the series supported by DEL Worldwide Express, WWW Express, Petron Corp., Liquid Corp., Admiral Luxuries Steamships (Bro.), BPC Motor Organ, Hans Bronzeus Jewelers, Mercury Sport's Corp., Dixie Wholesome Enterprises, HSBC Mahalaray Hilles Visa, Rep. Lala Ramos Ltd. District, Caraballo's, Daisy Festival of Phoenix Engineering and Eastel Estates, the official hotel.

Defending champion Lara Ambero made a 75, 337 and dropped to a tie for third place with Anya Templero (69-137) and Korean Bin Cha Wu (72-137) in the contest that drew nearly 80 female golfers from all over the land.

Like in the first round, Agojo, who won the Philippine Ladies Open in January at Manila Golf Club, also had mixed results on the two par 5s—7 and 17—in stride for birdies.

She scorched the back nine with five birdies, including three straight from the 11th, as she displayed some flawless putting.

"Very putting today," said Agojo. "Feel so hot."

Scores: Championship: (M) Agojo 160 (Mountain view), Ingalera, Jove 160 (La Jacinta, Mt Mesa, BPMA), R. Gonzalez, M. Lozada 68-71, 70-70, 139 (Mountain view), Antonio 71 & Gonzalez, 69 Sang.

Second division: 71-70-141, M. Ventura (Tuscan), 71 Nueve 71 Sabang, 111. Ilocos, 35 Millions (Mt. Carmen), 35 Ilocos, 35 Sarangani, 35 Agusan.

Third division: 71-70-141, Nicholas Mendoza, 68 Tala, Mesa, 35 Soldier's Mesa 35, 35 Davao, 35 Ormoc 70 Co, 35 Antipolo, 35 Mindoro, 35 Davao, 70 Gumaca, 35 Lucena, 35 Cebu, Ilog, 34 Mesa.

Scores: 1-81 Antonio, 82 Del Rosario, 83 Ramos, 84 Cruz, Ilog, 34 Mesa.

AGOJO: Ahead by 12 shots after her closed platinum.

SAGUPAAN
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Jaidee stays ahead by 2

JAIDEE moves to 14-under.

KUALA LUMPUR—Defending champion Thongchai Jaidee of Thailand spoiled Thomas Bjorn's 34th birthday celebrations with three late birdies to finish two strokes clear on the Malaysian Open second round on Friday.

Thongchai again showed his liking for the Saujana course in Kuala Lumpur with a six-under-par round of 66 to move to 14-under to the un-tournament Asian and European Tour event.

Bjorn, seeking his eighth tour victory, fired nine birdies in an eight-under-par 64.

Thailand's Prom Meesawee (68) and Sweden's Henrik Stenson (68) were next, four on 12-under par, with Spain's Miguel Angel Jimenez (67) and Sweden's Peter Gustafsson (68) tied on fifth spot on nine-under, one ahead of Ireland's Padraig Harrington and Gary Murphy.

Filipino Angelo Que, the Volvo Asian Open champion, bounced back from a 71 in the opening round with an eagle-spiked two-under-par 70 to safely make the cut.

He was among those at 1-over spot with a 142 total.

Que highlighted his second with an eagle on the 15th hole. He also had two birdies and the same number of bogeys.

Thongchai sealed his victory last year when he aced the 16th and birdied the last hole and the 24-year old eventually repeated that effort on day two. He hit the flagstick at 16, drilled a putch shot to outrun a foot of the 17th hole and dropped in two feet as the last for his course of birdies.

"I saw Thomas Bjorn before I teed off and I congratulated him on his score but then I had to play my own game, which is always for me wins, greens and putts," Thongchai told reporters.

Denmark's Bjorn, ranked 37th in the world, rekindled hopes of ending a winless drought of more than two years. (Reuters)

Amonsot yields to Indon fighter

FILIPINO Conie Amonsot bowed to Indonesian Ginawa Bintar Bulan via technical knockout in the fifth round last Thursday at the PETI Stadium in Jakarta.

Reports had it, that Amonsot, from Naghilawan, Bohol, had Bintar at the verge of a knockout in the third frame, but the Indon regained his composure to escape further punishment.

Bintar then caught Amonsot with a swing right to the head, running the ALALAY to middle. The Indon referee then quickly stepped in to stop the fight.

Reportedly, Bintar was in bad shape in the third round, but the referee let the fight to continue.

Amonsot's record dipped to 7 wins, 1 loss with 4 knockouts while Bintar improved to 5 wins, 2 losses with 3 KOs. Darlene L. Lagumbay

Asean Para Games set

PREPARATIONS are in full swing for the staging of the 3rd Asean Para Games in Manila a week after the 23rd Southeast Asian Games from Nov. 27 to Dec. 5.

PSC Commissioner Michael L. Rabuda, executive Deputy Philippine Asean Para Games Organizing Committee chair, said priorities for that historical, marching and classification contests as well as judo and goal ball lotteries have been lined up.

Rabuda Bistro Centeno, the International Paralympic Committee judo coordinator, will give judo lectures on March 13 at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex while Chin Wu Tee and Athel Hansen will hold goal ball lectures at the Philippine multi-purpose Coliseum.

Philippine secretary general Emmanuel Pessen also lured nine-up games for the athletes.

Among those on the Manila Jaycee Cup-16th Phil. Wheelchair Games to be staged on March 6 to April 3 at the Philippine complex, De Ubilla Philippine Wheelchair on March 12, the 2nd Philippine national paralimpic championships on March 27-30 at the Philippines and the Philippine Para Games qualifying meets to be held on April 7-10 in Zamboanga City.

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InqBox
Question of the Week
A survey says that more Filipinos are unhappy with their lovelife. What can be done to make your lovelife happier?
Answers of Chat! & facts as published on Tuesday's InqBox will earn you an 'Inquirer Mug!'
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INQUIRER Visayas

E-mail: ... John Jon Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Edralyn L. Bermudez

Townsfolk hold vigils for Sto. Niño

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
Inquirer, Antique

THE STO. NIÑO in Bagtason

SUSUSONG residents parade the headless Sto. Niño last Ash Wednesday

NELIE Undiong, 55, wept openly as devotees carried the headless Sto. Niño de Bagtason outside the church. Sadness was also evident on the faces of around 1,500 people who filled the church during the Ash Wednesday Mass.

For nearly three weeks now, the Catholic faithful in Bugasong town, 45 km south of the capital of San Jose in Antique, have been holding daily processions, praying for the return of the hands and head of their Sto. Niño image.

Soldiers stole the ivory-made head and two hands of the 300-year-old image on Jan. 30, 12 days after the town celebrated its fiesta. They took advantage of a downpour that lasted until dawn, destroyed the padlock of one of the church's doors and ran off the back of the iron grills enclosing the image of the Child of Bagtason facing the altar.

The mutilated icon was left as a row of pews away by the sacristans. The soldiers also left behind a bolo (talibong), a cap and a hooded sweatshirt.

The theft has shocked most of the town's 29,000 residents who are grieving for the symbol of their faith and community.

'People power'

Hundreds of people have attended the daily vigils. Those who cannot join the processions light candles in front of their houses during the passing of the Angelus.

In the hinterland villages, people pray the rosary aired through the local community radios.

"We could not describe how we feel. It's as if one of our children was beheaded," Undiong said.

She said their patron was unacceptable for two minutes in her life.

She says children for 10 years until she and her husband prayed hard to the Sto. Niño. Prayers included her son of Angelo Jose when he was 9 years old, said Undiong.

Elders said the Sto. Niño saved the townsfolk rich and even helped put out fires in the town.

"We feel a great loss because it has been with us for generations," said Iris Villanueva, 34, a lay leader.

He said that when some of the robbers came out, many of the elderly fell on their knees and cried, "as if they have lost a loved one."

On Feb. 9, police arrested five suspects tagged by witnesses, but failed to recover the stolen items.

The suspects were identified as Charlie Gadiloy, 34, Percy Tenorio, 39, Frederick Almonares, 24, Francisco Delos, 35, and a 16-year-old boy, all residents of Bugasong. They have denied involvement in the crime.

Almonares later executed an affidavit, pointing to Insp. Maximo Solano, Jr. the town's former police chief, as the mastermind.

Solano denied the accusation. He was relieved from his post a week after the robbery after town officials complained of the slow pace of investigation.

Recovery

But residents are more concerned with the recovery of the stolen parts of the Sto. Niño.

"We cannot have them (robbers). Justice is up to God and we can only pray that they return it," said Undiong.

The Sto. Niño, shrunk (it is less tall), was said to be brought to Bugasong in 1733, as a gift from Queen Isabella of Spain, said Hilamoreo, 69-year-resident of town elders. The icon's cape is said to be made of platinum.

In 1933, the whole image was stolen; it was returned only in February 1984. Bulig-town leaders and Barangay representatives to arrange collection in Iloilo City who bought it from the robbers.

While it was returned without any payment, the image was sold at P4 million during that time.

Bugasong parish priest Pedro "Pedi" Olivo Jr. said the Sto. Niño image now "pero pinto."

"My will not stop until they are found," said Villanueva.

Elders have asked for help for the recovery of the stolen parts. Anyone with information could contact him at mobile phone numbers 09/7-114-3928, 0920-604-0866 or 0917-305-1120.

Guimaras women talk about 'interval, closure, gateway and journey'

By Ms. Dixie Lalores
Iloilo City

A WOMAN'S river of life has many breaks and turns, and one of them is menopause. Some women have negotiated it smoothly while others have had a wild roller ride.

Menopause has been worrisome for some women, but it's no big deal for others.

Both these women, aged 50-60 years old, were recently part of a study on menopause conducted by the deputy of the Philippine Health-Social Science Association (PHSSA) in Guimaras. They came from the towns of Jordan, Sibunag and Buenavista.

The study brought out their anxious and fear of menopause, which is inevitable as they grow old, as well as their insights into it. Some experiences were hilarious, while others were quite unpleasant.

The authors were Genevieve Bendaña, Evelyn Fernandez, Beatrice Aurea Pi-ed and Arriane Mercano, all of the PHSSA.

Bilipinayan does not have an equivalent term for menopause, but the women were able to define it by describing their bodily experiences. It's menopause when they experienced "ang pagbalik sang regla nga pangsiyal ang tuna" ("the kind of menstrual cycle that the women's capacity to bear children).

It says that a woman is no longer young, and the start of old age, the end of youth, infertile and beauty, they said.

There is also a notion of being clean as menstrual blood is considered unclean. For many of them, it is a relief and comfort that they no longer have monthly periods.

Myths

There are so many sorts of disturbing menopause-related myths surrounding it. One such myth is the popular "pasma," which defies translation in English. "Pasma" could have originated from Señor menopause when the young women were used to sitting aloft and resting grown-ups during her period.

Another myth: If the mother has an early menopause, chances are the daughter will have it early, too. None of these are true, according to medical professionals.

There are many signs and symptoms of menopause, both physical and psychological.

Some of the women experienced hot or cold flashes ("nagasulo ang kalibo kag pagsulonggan"), nervousness ("nagnerbyos"), irritability, Cystitis (ang kagunggan"), body aches and loss of appetite.

Others noticed they feel sweat through some times they associated with early pregnancy. A hang-over drowsy and dizzy.

The feminine experience was dynamic of the region that made one painful and uncomfortable.

The women said they did not fully understand the changes in their bodies. But while these were uncomfortable, not one of them considered menopause an illness. The symptoms would disappear anyway, they said.

There were some who did not know how (or) attend for vitamins.

Now the menopausal women in Guimaras to work off their feelings and relief in fun. They "entertained" themselves through singing, playing "tong-its" (a card game), walking around, reading the Bible, and working.

They blamed themselves to God. Their bodies, reduced to human, are sought spiritual bodily, consulted an "arbularyo" (faith healer) and talked with other menopausal women.

But one woman who experienced crying spells doubted if it was to her fears out.

The case of children growing up and leaving home actually compounded the menopause, causing some women to be astringent.

Some researchers said menopausal depression was like post natal depression, caused by hormones and alterations in body rhythm. But most women's response to nerves them without psychological disturbance.

Coconut oil

Menopause does not mean the end of women sex life, according to the study, but sexuality takes on more meaning as the husband and wife experience dryness. Despite this sexual drive, some women avoided sex because of pain and discomfort. But some remedied the problem by using "lana" or coconut oil as lubricant.

No longer at risk of getting pregnant and free from menstrual cramps and bleeding, unpredictable by some women, and they got by with a little help from coconut oil.

At first, what's new with the changes in women's bodies during menopause? They've been through many changes anyway since they were adolescents.

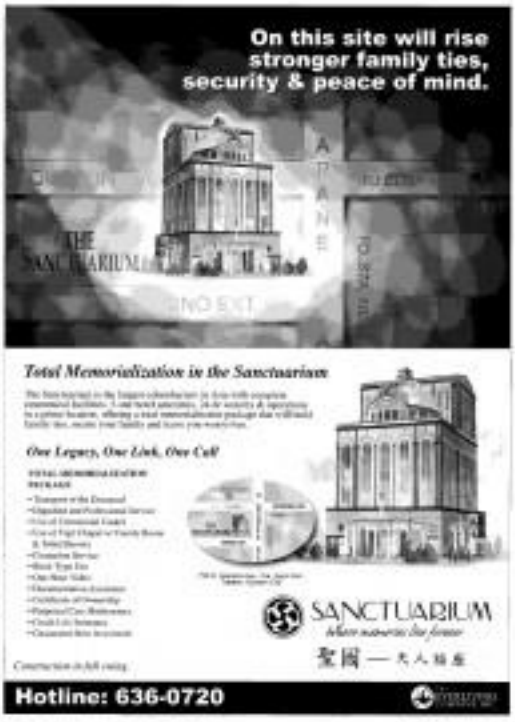
Menopause, in the women of Guimaras said, did not mean a dead-end for one's sexuality. The loss of fertility does not mean the loss of sexuality, meaning that one who is no longer capable of making babies does not mean any sexual urge.

But what is really lacking in the women's needs in menopause is the lack of information that will help them cope with the bodily changes, the study said. There are no seminars they can engage in.

Instead, one of the authors said the women's need for information had not been answered by the health care system. It's a right that should be addressed by the government, she said.

One good practice assumed to by the informants was sharing their experiences with other menopausal women and positively coach other women who had been the target.

Menopause is all about growing old and, like many adversities and blessings, women should count to come active, the study said.



Santo Tomas batters nip UP, clinch crown

SANTO TOMAS survived a stubborn defending champion University of the Philippines, 8-7, Thursday at the final ballpark to clinch the men's baseball title of the UAAP's Season 67 via a rare 16-game sweep of the eliminations.

The Tiger title was [illegible] making them the seventeenth baseball team to the league.

Jun Jun Bolden, named the season's most valuable player, struck out two batters at the bottom ninth, ending yielding an RBI single to shortstop Jason Natanauan. But still Jason Stanwald Palacol, 6-7.

[illegible] to 6-6 and will [illegible] second place with National University, which also clinched its ninth win in 10 matches at the expense of La Salle, 9-8, Thursday. The 65th[illegible] to set at 1 p.m. tomorrow, also at the Rizal Memorial.

Nerissa Jose Adamera, 18-6, [illegible] both teams finished with similar 3-7 win-loss cards, the Eagles bagged fourth place by virtue of a superior run quotient.

That almost marked the Tigers, but, was unruffled.

"Grabe ito sa kanila na Asang mga pasko," sang-ayunang mga alala," said coach Jeffrey Tanchanco, the country's finest hurler in the early 1980s. "Ang collapse ang pitcher ng UP pagkating ng ninth game," said Tanchanco.

BIG OVER: The ambassan Tigers celebrate their title romp after overcoming the gritty Maroons.

Eagles tackle Tigers for football title

ATENEO de Manila's hunters gun for their second straight UAAP football title tomorrow when they clash with University of Santo Tomas at 3 p.m. at the Rizal Memorial in Quezon City.

Coach Shinong Mendoza Ateneans are wary ahead of the UST Tigers with 20 points on seven wins, two draws and a loss.

UST mentored by Benny Cargin, has 16 points on three wins and seven draws, but it has the distinction of battling Ateneo to draws—0-0 and 1-1—in their two previous meetings.

UST actually tied for second place with the Ateneo University with identical 36 points, but earned a shot at Ateneo for having a better goal difference, 7-1.

Coach Chua Wah's La Salle squad shoots for its third straight season's crown against University of the Philippines earlier at 1 p.m.

The CLAD fellas have 19 points on six wins, six draws and one loss while UP has 16 points on five wins, one draw and three defeats.

The Diliman girls suffered La Salle's lone loss, 1-0, in the first round.

Team and individual awards for best scorer and runners will follow the two matches. Individual prizes will be given to the most valuable player, best defender, best goalkeeper, best midfielder and highest scorer both for men and women.

NEU, University of the East, La Salle and UP finished from third to sixth in the men's division while UST, Ateneo and FEU ranked third to fifth in the women's group, respectively.

The Blue Eagles strengthened their bid to retain the men's crown when they defeated UE 3-1, Wednesday afternoon.

Jose Angelo Pereña (24th), Ignatius Michael Inglis (23rd) and Mark Jhonson Miles (46th) scored for the Eagles.

Melitony Bilano scored both goals for UST, which ended second spot via a 2-1 win over UP also Wednesday. The Tigers are 2-7-4 in the season's closing.

In the other game, FEU blanked La Salle, 3-0.

SPORTSWATCH

NCAA beach volleyball fires off today

BEACH volleyball fanatics are in for a treat when the UAAP beach volleyball tournament takes center stage when starting at 8 a.m. today at the La Salle Greenhills court. Presented by Mizuno with co-presentation Kondos and Asset and organized by Sports Connection, the tournament will run until Feb. 27. The women's only last year as an NCAA demonstration sport and will be contested at the league's season of official sports next season. Organizers are optimistic that the tournament will again be a big hit among outdoor sports-loving UP fairness. The 2nd NCAA beach volleyball tournament is sponsored by Ronnie Ricketts, Sports, Bancos, Manila, Phoenix Gas, Mikasa, Hot Bull, Stanley Land & Living FM.

Chi Iejin title fight on 'Main Event'

THE SECOND title defense of WBC featherweight champion Chi Iejin against #5th Youth champion Tommy Browne in Australia will be televised on the top-rating weekly boxing show "Main Event" at 11 p.m. tomorrow over RPN-9. Also featured will be highlights of the featherweight title bout between Iejin and Mark Scott, who is managed by Shelly Finkel, the new manager of King Magulon featherweight champion Manny Pacquiao and veteran Lamont Roberston. Chi is considerable potential future opponent of Pacquiao and with international promoter Michael Mokaba had given the right to co-promote fights for the WBC champion in the US. It is likely that he will get the top opponents that had been fixed before. Chi will be trained in Cebu City for the Browne title fight is managed by the South Korean businessman sportswear Kusang Lee.

Rookie Challenge kicks off NBA All-Stars

SIX All-rookie will be featured in the 2005 NBA All-Star Weekend starting today with the Rookie Challenge kicking off this year's mid-season extravaganza in Denver. Taken a glimpse of the fast-rising stars of tomorrow as sophomores LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers and Dwyane Wade of the Miami Heat battle the rookies of this year's top rookies in the Sol NBA Rookie Challenge to be aired live beginning at 10 a.m. On the sophomore side are rookie calling the NBA's rookies against the sophomores will also be replaced by RPN-9 announcer at 10a.m. as it serves as an appetizer to the Fast contest Allstar NBA All-Star Game on Feb. 21. It will be shown live on Solar Sports and RPN-9 at 4 in the morning with a replay at 7:30 p.m. over RPN-9.

Pearl Darts Classic resumes

THE SECOND leg of the Pearl Darts Classic 2005 monthly darts series tomorrow at 6 p.m. Lobby at the Pearl of the Orient Hotel and Spa at the 4th floor of Pearl Plaza Mall, along Quirino Avenue, Tondo, Paradise City. The tournament serves as a tune-up for participants in the Darts Council of the Philippines-Metro Manila Darts Circuit second leg starter of the Pool Sport Cafe in Gen. Luis on Feb. 26-27 and the much-awaited Philippines Open in Baguio City on March 4-6. The Pearl event features a cash prize of P10,000. Also supporting the series are Sat Miguel Beer and Bonita Mineral Water. Male or lady is classified doubles tandem all players unable lady darters down to pair. 800/101 double tandem. Entry fee is P100 per player. For inquiries, call 861-1407/ 861-4268.

National cycling pool get support

THE BATANAS cycling team will continue using Chona road time and AEAN mountain bike bike courtesy of Ubix Trading for its training for the 23rd Southeast Asian Games. The support was reaffirmed by Lito Magsaysay, president of Ubix Trading, which has supported the national cycling team for the last four years. The Integrated Cycling Federation of the Philippines (PhilCycling) board welcomed Ubix Trading's assistance. The same brands of bikes, according to Magsaysay, would also be used in the NCA games proper for the national cyclists, who have entered the gas and are their event for a 17-gold sweep in the road, mountain bike and velodrome events.

Palace sees no stumbling block to nat'l ID system

By Cid Cabauatan Jr. and Christine O. Avendaño

MALACAÑANG does not see legal impediments to the establishment of an identification system, first on the local level and later on a national scope, as part of plans to pinpoint terrorists.

President Macapagal-Arroyo and her administration are backing the legislation of a national ID system to comply with a Supreme Court ruling ordering it.

Asked to comment on the matter, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye told the Inquirer: "The Supreme Court did not rule that any ID system law was unconstitutional." Bunye was referring to Administrative Order No. 308 issued by then President Fidel Ramos.

Bunye said the constitutionality of AO 308 was challenged because it was considered compulsory for Congress' power to legislate and to introduce into an individual's right to privacy.

While the tribunal declared AO 308 unconstitutional, Bunye said it was only because the order had "insufficient safeguards and well defined standards to protect right to privacy," that "there are not enough compelling interest to justify intrusion."

Confident

In the going through the legislative mill, Malacañang is confident of finally implementing a national ID system that, according to Mr. Bunye, is "one of the key elements of the antiterror or internal security bill now in Congress."

The President has anticipated legal complications from the President's order for provincial boards to adopt an ID system in their areas that would stop terrorism at the climb of "internal unfriendlies."

"Whenever there is potential to the protected level a presumed legal and constitutional audit process otherwise. So, while there is no national bill, local and provincial governments have the right to enact their own laws in the interest of public welfare to protect their constituents. These ordinances are presumed valid and regular until tested in court," he said.

Bunye said Filipinos had nothing to fear from a national ID system and other antiterror schemes.

"Law-abiding citizens [who] are not hiding anything has have nothing to worry about," he said, and noted that the United States, United Kingdom, France, Canada, Israel, Australia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore had varying antiterror laws.

"It is timely that we pass our own version of the law, especially in the wake of rising incidence of terrorism," Bunye said.

Executive order

But Senate President Franklin Drilon said the Palace, and not Congress, should implement the planned system.

Drilon said he favored such a system but stressed that this could be best addressed through an executive order. "If you are coming up with a law, that would entail long debates," he told reporters in Iloilo City.

He said Mr. Arroyo could just issue an executive order to dust off the ID cards of the various government agencies could be consolidated into one card.

"The Senate cannot impose a law on the line but by the ID system because it has the widest membership," Drilon said.

But Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago observed that Filipinos were not receptive to forging documents.

"If you're issuing a paper with pictures on it, there it's not going to convey the purpose," she said.

Senate Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan said such a system "might open the floodgates for possible human rights abuses."

'Cedula'

Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile said he was not in favor of a national ID system, was not sure.

He said Speaker-designate Prospero Nograles had already filed a measure creating the cedula. But Sen. Rodolfo Biazon opposed the setting up their cedula, invoking the Cry of Balintawak that led to the Philippine Revolution.

Arroyo said that in the Philippines' history, no government established a national system.

Senate President Pro Tempore Nene Pimentel, during the martial law period, who says cedula not to mean as it. We cannot belittle or ignore history and our culture," the senator said.

"We are verifying all the information because we don't want to take any chances," Garcia added.

According to Garcia, the witness called police hotline 117 and volunteered to help. He said the witness told the operator he'd been harassed by the suspects of the bombing.

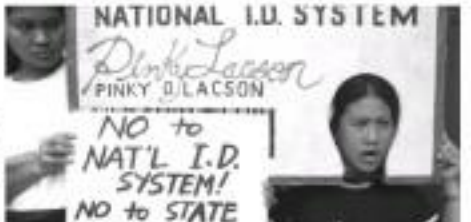
"The witness proceeded to Malate police because he refused to go to a station near the area where he and his family live," Garcia said.

Muslim doubts witness

He said the suspect arrived at the Malate police headquarters while a closed-door meeting between police and local government officials was going on.

Rep. Benjamin Lagman (1st District, Albay) doubts on the credibility of the police witness.

Abdulwahid, party-list Rep. Majid Hamasan said if the witness was really



GLADYSHIP pink power successor Gabriela's fiery opposition to the proposed national ID system at the press conference of the militant women's group in Quezon City on Friday. PHOTO BY

Poverty ...

(Continued from A1)

less, the government has to borrow to meet its operational requirements," it stressed.

Debt burden

As such, the IEM noted that debt interest payments increased to more than 40 percent last year, or more than 4 percent from previous year's level, and a big portion of the national budget.

"Undeniably, government expenditures in social services have been successfully falling," it said.

Debt overhang in economic growth, it also argued, included envy low investment levels, caused by the poor investment climate.

As a result, it said the country was suffering from limited capital formation, limited productivity improvements and limited remunerative forms.

Corruption, tax issues

SGBS 2004 survey of the investment climate in the Philippines found the major constraining blocks and constraints to private investment to include macroeconomic instability, corruption, electricity and tax issues.

"A high population growth rate through the country's attempt to pass the economy, to some extent through job and to provide quality services," it said.

The Philippines' population growth is 2.36 percent per year, it is one which the ADB said made it difficult to accommodate all new entrants to the labor force into if economic growth were accelerated.

"A rapidly growing population also tends to dilute the benefits of economic growth over time," it said.

It noted that slower growth translates to keep up with the inflow of what are already deficient public services in health, education, water supply and sanitation, and so on," the report said.

"Thus, poverty would slower exacerbate over larger families are more likely to be poor. Only 19 percent of families with 3 members were poor in 2000, while the poverty incidence among families with 8 members was 55 percent," it said.

Vicious cycle

"Poverty and population together form a vicious circle: poverty perpetuates high population growth rates; population growth rates perpetuate poverty," it said.

The bank said investment in education, especially in primary level, the foundation for poverty reduction.

"Without adequate levels of human capital—knowledge, skills and health—the other assets will be less productive. Once attained the benefits of a high-quality, adequate public education system has been steadily eroding," it said.

"Many of the indicators are on a downward trend, such as the net enrollment rate ... and the drop-out rate."

"English skills, traditionally one of the competitive advantages of the Philippines, have also deteriorated," it said.

3 blast suspects known

(Continued from A1)

of the office.

Looking for mastermind

Pressed further on their identities, Garcia stepped back and said: "What we can tell the public is we are doing everything to identify and arrest the perpetrators."

He said the police were now validating the information from the witness and that they wanted to apprehend not only the direct participants, but also the mastermind.

"We also want to know their affiliation," Garcia added.

Garcia said the witness "was not a participant" in the bombing.

Four witnesses

Investigators now have four credible witnesses, including the driver, who can describe the male in witness and Mary Lou Jacobo, one of the victims of the blast, Garcia said.

Woman with no name

(Continued from A1)

WHO was she?

Four days after she was killed in a bomb blast inside a passenger bus in Makati, she was still a woman without a name.

Her body, charred beyond recognition, lay unclaimed in the Veterans Funeral Parlor in Pasay.

Her co-victims—

Who could a lady had come to the police and said her brother might be that of her mother, Rosario Mercado, 56, of Bonifacio, Cavite.

The claimant was Angelica Mercado, 27.

But the victim was buried beyond recognition, leading it hard for investigators to identify it, PNP Chief Pendatun said.

Dr. Fabian Wahid of the police scientific crime team has proposed that DNA tests be done on the remains and on Angelica to see if their characteristics would match.

The result of the planned test DNA tests will be known in two months.

Only then will the police be able to release the body, police said.

Which means that only then will Angelica's agonizing ordeal end. Irene C. Perez

'He was a quiet, kind man'

By Irene C. Perez

CIDE, engineer Ronnie Estanislao was all dressed up for work on Valentine's day. At his wife about to leave, his son teased him not to go to work but go, instead, on a date.

Estanislao shrugged and said he had no girlfriend, that he'd rather meet his fourteen-times-sweetheart, Rebelyn, instead and, he decided to send his two brothers to school.

That was the last time Soledad Social elite her nephew. Later in the day, she learned he was murdered in the bombing of a passenger bus in Makati and that he was among the badly injured.

Yesterday, at around 4 a.m., four days after he was murdered and sold into a coma, Ronnie died at the intensive care unit of the Ospital ng Makati, aged 27. He was the fourth fatality in the Makati blast.

"I held his hand every night when I talked to him. I told him to go to work for us, instead, on a date.

Jovenes struggled and said he had no girlfriend, that he'd rather meet Jennelyn

Free dentures put smile on traffic enforcement

From page A1

(MMDA) traffic officers.

They complain the first batch of the 300 were to benefit from the "Bagong Ngiti sa Daang Hardin" project of First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo.

"Kailangan ang mga ganitong [Traffic enforcers should smile when they are approaching erring drivers. If they cannot, it would look like they're asking for bribes]," MMDA chair Bayani Fernando said.

Hard to communicate

Arroyo, who calls the project a "gift to enamored motorists," said that enforcers with bad or missing teeth tend to cover their mouths while speaking, making it hard for them to communicate.

Ricardo Alviola, 56-year-old father of six, said it was his first time to wear dentures. He had lost all his upper teeth, he said, and his meager salary did not allow him to have dentures made.

The toothless retiree could no longer chew any food, he said. "I've been called names like 'lampa'."

TOUR OF FALSE TEETH: A traffic enforcer finds his dentures get a new set of teeth on Friday courtesy of Mr. Mike Arroyo's "Bagong Ngiti sa Daang Hardin." The privately funded project includes 2,000 dentures for traffic enforcers. MIKE ALQUINTO

Eyes, teeth sparkling

Alviola gamely posed for his first set of new dentures—with eyes and teeth sparkling.

Another Villanueva in our view as wearing dentures, however, she had been wearing the same set since 1982.

"I never had a new set made because I'd rather spend [the money] on my kids," the 46-year-old traffic enforcer said. "The new, updated set not only saves my money, it has given me self-confidence," she said.

Fernando said that when he learned that police officers and traffic enforcers were the first employees of the project, he told his wife not to forget his officers who are always speaking to people on the course of their job.

By putting teeth to the two enforcers, "they can now speak with a smile," he said.

More sides next

Next to get their new set of dentures would be 200 Metro aides, Fernando added.

"Bagong Ngiti sa Daang Hardin" kicked off in October last year. The First Gentleman said that P2 million, which all came from private funds, had been spent for the project giving brighter smiles to 2,410 Filipinos so far.

GMA warns of debt crisis …

From page A1

more fails to raise the P80 billion in additional revenues and savings it needs to meet the budget deficit.

"The bottom line is we need to raise P80 billion [through] legislative measures and P140 billion [through] administrative measures. Other than, we have never done nor will be we as president," the President said in a speech in Lubao, Pampanga province.

In August 2009, the President declared that the country was in a fiscal crisis on fears that it was treading the same path as debt-ridden economies, but critics said she declared it without having done much to address the problem.

Finish economic reforms

The US-based Moody's Investors Service last Monday cited the Philippines' bigger credit risk—which would mean P114 billion in additional interest rate costs for the country next year—largely because of the continued backlog in government and foreign debt which curbs the country's ability to finance its economic needs.

"We pledged to the bodies this time, let us not push me back. Let's do the revenue, certain reforms and measures there," the President said.

"We expect a better tomorrow if we all work together, if we have clear objectives, if we work in Congress for our economic reforms," she said in order to face new reform legislative packages in meeting P80 billion in the first semester being a massive program.

Some have pointed out that the President, who has blamed media for feeding the credit rating agencies with incorrect data of negative news on the country's fiscal situation, has also to share the blame for the alleged downgrade from Moody's because of her administration in passing fiscal reform programs.

GMA shares blame

She has warned legislators to do something about the widening deficit or face new taxes for legislators, it was pointed out.

Palace officials have been busy not only in downplaying Moody's two-notch credit rating downgrade but also defending the blame for it away from the President.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunoan yesterday said that it was up also to blame the President for Moody's assessment which has been disputed by a number of reputable banks such as the HSBC, Standard Chartered and the Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corp.

Bunoan also defended a 33-hour Congressional's working movement of the Philippines' investment situation which cited the government's failure to root out corruption, where the judicial process and pass fiscal reform bills.

"The analysis of Moody's and the 33-hour [Congressmen] must have been on vacation because they based their analysis on old information," he said.

Upbeat on upgrade

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, an economic adviser of the President, predicted yesterday that the Philippines was sure to get a "positive" outlook on its sovereign credit rating from Moody's this year as Congress would definitely pass the crucial revenue-generating measures.

Salceda, who chairs the House committee on economic affairs, was interviewed on the sidelines of a briefing for investors at the Philippine International Life and General Insurance Co. (Philamlife) last Thursday.

The congressman said the Philippines would get an "upgrade" at least in outlook for this year as the key reforms he sees to push through.

"With or without the Moody's ruling, Congress will pass the reform measures because we know the government needs the revenues," Salceda said.

Although Moody's is not due to make its next sovereign rating on the Philippines until next year, the rating agency can change its outlook anytime.

Outlook

Financial analysts tend to view a revision in outlook as a precursor to a change in ratings.

A "positive" outlook means that an upgrade is possible in the next rating while a "negative" means a possible downgrade.

A "stable" outlook means the current rating would likely be reaffirmed.

The Philippines' debt ratings with Moody's are in each four notches below the much-coveted investment grade with a "stable" outlook.

Moody's recently lowered the Philippines' foreign-currency rating for government bonds to B1 from Ba2.

Based on Moody's new definition of bond ratings, bonds that are rated "B" generally lack the characteristics of a desirable investment while assurance of interest and principal payments or maintenance of other terms of the contract over any long period of time may be small.

The VAT

Salceda said Congress would likely pass the reform "value-added tax (VAT) bill soon, taking the rate by two percentage points to 12 percent."

"But a two-year phase-in by a likely compromise: 11 percent in 2012 and 12 percent in 2013," Salceda said, noting that the increase would raise P217 billion in fresh revenues or 2.8 percent of the P7.62 trillion gross collection.

"The 45 percent in still lower than Latin America's average of 15 percent and China's 17 percent but higher than Thailand's 7 percent and Indonesia's 10 percent," he said.

Despite opposition from many sectors, Salceda said he was confident that the measure would pass.

In addition, he said the government would generate fresh revenues from several reforms, such as the approval of the lease (P16 billion); the sale of the Masinloc plant (P11 billion); the approved increase in National Power Corp. tariffs (P10 billion), and the reduction of legislative pork barrel (P10 billion).

"There are various revenue-generating and revenue measures that are in progress with reasonable chances of approval," Salceda said.

Nagastar assets

For other uses, he said the sale of the Government Service Insurance System would likely raise about P 150 billion.

Salceda said the government could also raise revenues from a second wave of privatization.

"We can sell the government stake in San Miguel Corp. and Meralco," he said.

While the Moody's credit downgrade, the country would have to increase its positive bond issuance and external borrowings (official development assistance from multilateral bodies like the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, the Asian Infrastructure Bank and the International Monetary Fund), Salceda said.

METRO
Editor Dave G. Diyco | Assistant Editor Connie B. Bino

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CA denies Strunk bid to junk slay raps

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE COURT of Appeals has affirmed its previous decision not holding the filing of murder charges against Strunk for the killing of his wife, actress Bernadette Sembrano, in November 2001.

In a one-page resolution, the appellate court's Special 14th Division denied Strunk's motion for reconsideration "for lack of merit," and asked the court to continue its ruling on Aug. 23 last year. The court's August decision upheld the filing of the murder case against Strunk and the issuance of a warrant of arrest against him.

"We cannot accept the motion for reconsideration. It posts nothing new," said the resolution penned by Associate Justice Hakim Abdulwahid.

It advances no new argument of the consequence or substance that had not been addressed and resolved in our Aug. 23 decision," it added.

The appellate court had said that there was enough evidence to sustain Strunk's indictment for the killing of Sembrano at the Atlantis condominium in San Juan on Nov. 7, 2001. Bianca Gonzalez-Intal testified that Strunk had threatened earlier her co-patient at the building's gym Sembrano, and Strunk was overheard by suspect Philip Medel as the mastermind behind the killing.

The court said one piece of circumstantial evidence supporting Intal's testimony was an entry in Sembrano's personal organizer's logbook that indicated Strunk and suspect Medel knew each other, and spoke to each other using Intal's phone.

Strunk's aide that he was at home during the hours Bianca was believed to have been killed was not supported by competent evidence, it said, adding that Strunk and suspect Medel knew each other, and spoke to each other using Intal's phone.

Strunk's aide that he was at home during the hours Bianca was believed to have been killed was not supported by competent evidence, it said, adding that Strunk and suspect Medel knew each other, and spoke to each other using Intal's phone.

Medel's involvement in Bianca's murder was also secured to his friends, the court said.

Police to spend summer in warehouses

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

THIS summer, the metropolitan police are heading out to the beaches but to warehouses.

The National Capital Region Police Office has ordered its five police districts to hold random inspections of warehouses all over the metropolis after authorities found an alleged shabu factory in Valenzuela City.

Regional police director Andro Kakilan II said the inspections would be coordinated with the Bureau of Fire Protection, which would be checking warehouses as part of the observance of Fire Prevention Month in March.

Another suspected illegal drugs factory was discovered the other day inside an affluent subdivision in Muntinlupa City.

Public support

Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency spokesperson Bernardo Rondez credited the cooperation of residents for the two discoveries.

"The public has been very supportive. We have been receiving information from concerned residents," Rondez said.

The alleged shabu factory in Valenzuela City was discovered last week after people started complaining about its foul odor.

Authorities found drums of liquid shabu, cans of chemicals and equipment used in manufacturing illegal drugs in the warehouse in Barangay Pariada.

Police learned of the alleged shabu factory in Paradigm City through a call to the Patrol 117 hotline. They found about P6 million worth of completed shabu and chemicals used to manufacturing illegal drugs.

Added: If there might be other shabu factories in Metro Manila, Rondez said they would conduct inspections "to make sure" there weren't any.

Rondez said they were receiving information about other alleged drug storehouses in the metropolis and were trying to confirm the reports.

Change of procedure

Muntinlupa City police chief Sr/Supt. Jaime Lacuesta said the latest discovery would change the conduct of their inspections. "Before, we focused on warehouses in remote areas. But now we see that shabu laboratories could be operated in crowded areas," he said. Bolitico added that the city government was forming a task force to monitor warehouses in Muntinlupa.

Bolitico said Valenzuela was an attractive to shabu manufacturers because there were many warehouses for lease in the area. The warehouses were usually in remote places or in compounds with tall gates and wall concealing an area. The alleged shabu factory in Paradigm City is the fourth to be found inside Muntinlupa and Pilipas, police said.

US teens pursue mission with no fears

By Marjoue C. Ortiz

A DAY before American high school students Tyler McCormick and Morgan Van Buren were set to leave for the Philippines as youth volunteers for the 2005 Operation Smile Inc. international mission, bomb attacks were through three major cities in the country.

But the two 17-year-old girls remained undaunted and headed out in good to help Filipino children with cleft lips or palates, and other facial deformities have a "smile-worthy" future through plastic surgery.

"Our parents were supportive, given because of the bombings," McCormick, a Wildlife High (California) senior said. She said their parents even called up Operation Smile to make sure if it was safe for their daughters to travel.

"But in the end, they trusted because they knew how much we wanted to go," Norfolk High senior Van Buren added.

And McCormick: "I had wanted to go on this mission since I could go also!"

Van Buren, a Virginia native, admitted that they were a bit anxious about the trip than their counterparts. But the girls said their fears subsided when they encountered their escorts. "Besides, bad incidents could happen anywhere," McCormick said. "We could never exchange this opportunity of a lifetime for something."

The girls got hosted Operation Smile's local chapters in their own schools. They organize fund-raisers and awareness campaigns which help finance the organization's activities in 25 countries including the Philippines.

"But we dream of doing our share of the fieldwork to interact with the children whose lives people behind Operation Smile change (through surgery) and lend our services," Van Buren added.

When the girls were chosen for the mission, they were "overcome with happiness." Van Buren said she immediately thought of dumping stuffed bags full of toys for the children.

ALL SMILES. Morgan Van Buren, Heather Gardner and Tyler McCormick: Happy to be in the Philippines

McCormick, on the other hand, had another special mission. "My paternal grandmother, Mehrdad Carat, is a Filipina," she said, adding that her father's mother fell in love with her American soldier grandfather during the war. Carat then went off to live in the United States and never had the chance to visit her Philippine relatives.

Apart from fulfilling her long-time dreams of helping all these kids, it would be nice to visit the land of my grandmother's birth and maybe even get to know some relatives," McCormick said with a hopeful smile.

With their sponsor Heather Gardner, the girls were assigned to help out during the screening, surgery and post-operation care of children and adults referred to undergo surgery at the Jose Rizal Memorial Hospital in Manila beginning today until Feb. 27.

Bradshaw and McCormick said the experience would help them decide on what course to take when they finish high school. "We are thinking of becoming doctors," McCormick said.

But for now, the girls said, they are just contented with helping handicapped kids smile their first toothful smile in the world.

Obando backs move to sue DENR over dump

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

THE FIGHT continues for local officials in Orlando, Bulacan opposed to the operation of a garbage facility in Norzagaray.

Orlando councilor Donald Gomez told the Inquirer yesterday they were supporting the group which threatened to sue Secretary Michael Defensor of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) if he does not stop the operation of the dump.

The group, November 17 Movement and Sitong Sapak Orcapa, are opposing the construction of the controlled garbage facility in Barangay Tecta. The groups alleged that the dump violated the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, or Republic Act 9003, since it did not have an environmental compliance certificate.

But Socorro Mayor Toby Tengco again defended the facility as safe and legal.

"The facility has been issued by a while but the opposition have not yet shown any proof that the facility is hazardous," Tengco said. Moreover, he added that they were ready to allow the Joint Solidating committee's garbage facilities and clearly said 'yes.'

MetroBriefs

Mini Olympics

WHAT to do a hundred feet you want to have your valentine date? Go to the Gateway City High School this morning. There, you can join over other sports like the alternative, above or dark. The city government is holding a mini Olympics for "differently-abled" residents today, as part of the city's 43rd anniversary celebration. Apart from disabled basketball, participants may also join non-games like the tug-of-war, hard race, cross-country walking and other quaint games. Winners will get medals, trophies and cash. —Edson Tandoc Jr.

Kiddie art tilt

YES IT'S HAPPENING — The Beauty Pageant "will be the theme of a children's art competition to be held on Sunday at the downtown Rizal Park

Tutors get back canteen

By Tarra F. Quismundo

THE DEPARTMENT of Education (DepEd) has ruled in favor of teachers of the Lakandula High School who had protested against the privatization of their canteen.

Though canteen came about more than six months of protest actions, Assistant Secretary Ernesto Pineda ordered the canteen to be run by the school's teachers.

In a decision on Feb. 11, DepEd Undersecretary Juan Luis Morris Director declared illegal the school canteen's privatization as against law and. The teachers sought the DepEd's intervention in the controversy, as they felt the move violated the rights of the teachers cooperative.

"It is clear that the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) dated Aug. 14, 2004, is contrary to law... [and] operational a violation of the expressed provisions of DECS (Department of Education, Culture and Sports) Order No. 95," Guerrero said in his order secured by the Manila Division of City Schools Feb. 14.

The MOA was signed by former Lakandula principal Alice Blas and private concessionaire Michelle Pineda, allowing the latter to operate the Lakandula High School canteen. The DepEd decision canceled the private concession. It also ordered Pineda to "cease and desist from further managing and operating" the Lakandula school canteen.

Unpleasant hotel experience

ON TARGET
Ellen Tordesillas

THE FILIPINO "holidaymen" from California, Utah, Kinshasa, Acapulco and Sacramento, one had to go to the Shangri-La Hotel in Makati on Jan. 31, 2005, Sunday.

What happened to them could have happened to other guests of the five-star hotel. They were held up by gunmen who pretended to be members of the hotel staff.

On Monday night, as they were about to go to bed, mother and daughter received a call from the hotel operator. The operator asked Mr. De Jesus if the latter's hotel booked Abdul and that there were seven people who wanted to go to their room (Room 2704). She said so, and told the operator they didn't want to see anybody.

But the operator was insistent... telling her to call the head of security, a woman named Jesusleo, on her cellular phone.

Leandro told her she was on her way to the room. Jesusleo and her daughter were taken around Metro Manila by a cab that Leandro ordered them to take. Leandro had told them not to hail a cab in front of the Shangri-La Hotel but to walk out to the corner to catch a cab.

I got this information through an e-mail handed to me by a friend. I called up Shangri-La Hotel management and they confirmed that Engineer de Jesus had checked in at the hotel.

Ary Wanamo, the hotel's PR, said that the case was being investigated. She said there were no reports of any robbery.

Asked if the hotel operators at the hotel were being investigated, Wanamo said that she couldn't divulge some details as yet.

Mr. Hussain said that the hotel had taken additional security steps to prevent a repetition of the robbery. She screening all incoming calls to hotel guests.

I think the De Jesuses were not the first victims of the syndicate. The modus operandi mentioned other foreign guests not only in Shangri-La, but also in other hotels.

The source the syndicate is headed, the leader by the country's insurance industry.

Investigators should start with the hotel operators at the time the De Jesuses were held up.

* * *

The government will soon start the Northrail system that will connect Caloocan City and Bulacan, Bulacan, by railway.

The Northrail project is a 32-km double-track railway system. Civil works include the construction of a two-kilometer viaduct, 21 rail-over-road grade separation crossings, eight major bridges, six stations, and a maintenance depot. Estimated total project cost: $421.35 million.

The railway project is expected to push up business in Northern and Central Luzon and encourage Metro Manila.

BUSINESS

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BSP survey shows optimism picking up

By Doris C. Dumlao

BUSINESS confidence is recovering this quarter after a rather subdued Christmas season, perked up by key political and fiscal reforms as well as the recent sharp peso rebound against the US dollar.

According to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' business expectations survey for the first quarter of 2005, the overall business outlook diffusion index (BI) for the January-to-March period was steady at 37.6 percent compared to 38.6 percent in the last quarter of 2004.

The BI for the second quarter jumped to 34.2 percent from 21.3 percent a quarter ago.

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura said the optimism for the second quarter "could be explained by the fact that consumption-oriented sectors usually increase during the opening of the schoolyear and the harvest season, which contribute to brisk business activity."

Respondents attributed the improvement in their business optimism to increased market demand both here and abroad, the appreciation of the peso, political and fiscal reforms, their own business expansions, increase in tourist arrivals and improvement in their business operations, plans and strategies.

Recently, Makati-based investment house accurate economic intelligence from the private sector while Cesar Purisima, former trade secretary was transferred to the finance department. At the same time, several key tax reform measures have been passed by Congress.

Since the start of the year, strong portfolio inflow has perked up the peso to the P52-to-$1 level for the first time since October 2000.

BSP Assistant Governor Diwa Guinigundo said: "With these positive factors, it could be expected that exports and domestic consumption would increase and more foreign investments would come in during the first half of the year," he added.

The SI is the percentage share of firms that answered in the affirmative over those that answered in the negative. A positive DI indicates a favorable view when measuring confidence levels.

The BSP's survey, conducted from Jan. 11 to Feb. 9, had 538 respondents from representatives of various industry concentration, wholesale/retail trade and services—of which 53 percent came from the National Capital Region.

Of these sectors, the confidence index for the construction sector was most bullish at 58 percent while the indices for services and industry sectors were likewise optimistic at 33.4 percent and 31.1 percent, respectively.

Only the trade sector registered a negative confidence index of 7.1 percent, which was attributed by the BSP to seasonal factors.

Industry said in the major sources of optimism in the first two quarters of 2005 while business services and hotels/restaurants will drive the services sector," Guinigundo said.

Buenaventura noted that MCB respondents turned out to be more optimistic for the second and third quarters compared to the previous survey while outside MCB, there was some downturn in the current quarter before improving in the next quarter.

"Expectations of better economic performance in the second quarter of 2005 were further underscored as majority of the firms projected an increase in the volume of business activity in the first quarter and total business activity in the second quarter of 2005," he said.

However, high oil prices, rising inflation and the large fiscal deficit continued to be the major macroeconomic concerns, cited by the survey respondents.

"In addition, slower growth in major economies and downturns in the high-tech and commodity cycles are seen to constrain economic activity in the future," Buenaventura said.

Other risks cited were tight competition and insufficient demand, global economic ills (particularly the complicated tax structure), high interest rates, financial problems and poor access to credit.

Ayala eyes listing of IT unit

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

DISCLOSED: Mcconnellstones Inc., the electronics arm of the Ayala Group, is being primed to be a regional player as it sets its sights on possible acquisitions abroad, Ayala Corp. president Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala II said in a late afternoon briefing Monday.

Zobel said the Ayala Group was thinking of possibly listing IMI "in some point" but whether it would be on the Philippine stock exchange or on other regional bourses has yet to be determined.

"That has always been on our radar screen. Manila Water has second shoot. It would make sense to have IMI listed at some point and actually they're moving into an aggressive period right now," Zobel told reporters.

He also said that IMI might be looking at frontier acquisitions in China, but no timetable has

(STORY CONTINUED ON PAGE B2)

ZOBEL DE AYALA II

Local group shuns foreign bond mart

AYALA Corp. said it was not keen on tapping the international bond market for new debt after it managed to get down the bulk of its borrowing from this year.

This will translate the country's largest conglomerate from potential higher borrowing costs in the international debt market that may arise from the latest run by Moody's Investors Service of the country's sovereign debt rating.

Ayala managing director and senior assistant treasurer Antonio Jose de Leon is handling Ayala Treasury that Ayala's managing debts that was last dragged to $89 million from an original $230 million early in the year. Ayala repaid $150 million in maturing loans last January.

Ayala is also backed by a $200-million credit pile which it can tap to refinance.

"Moody's rating is not supposed to affect us because we don't have any subsidiaries tapping the international market for a bond issue anytime soon. Likewise, we have done most of our pre-funding last year, actually focusing on the peso," De Leon said. He added that Ayala has slashed some of its borrowings to peso loans. Where before Ayala used to source 90 percent of its liabilities from the US market, by the end of January, its dollar borrowings have dropped to 52 percent.

With a lower debt burden, the Ayala Group is also primed to spend roughly P35 billion in capital expenditures this year, the bulk of which will go to Globe Telecom Inc. and property arm Ayala Land Inc. Elizabeth L. Sanchez

Toilet tumor

IT'S time again for an advice column for investors in the stock market. Be careful!

Have you seen any sense in a game like our lawmakers, who recently voted to cut a two-month downgrade in our credit rating by dragging their feet on tax measures, let me inform you that the stock market is perking up again.

Well, only after seven years!

Anyway, as they say in the market, any boom is dook trading can only happen if the public starts putting money in stocks. Hmming, the public like!

The problem is, in this up and down market like ours—but we have, you have to fall for its fortunes—only you in your trading decision.

Unfortunately, information on the listed companies is not that easy to come by, not even from the SEC or the Philippine Stock Exchange.

Only the "well-connected" can get the, well, "right" information.

* * *

GSIS once acquired a furnisaver, the nickname of Interbay Wares Manufacturing Corp., a 72-percent subsidiary of the US multinational American Standard, the world's famous maker of ... well, toilets.

Three months ago, furnisaver declared insolvency. It said it could not pay off its debts anymore. The value of its assets, according to it, or to stockholders, was less than the amount of its debts—both will banks and suppliers.

furnisaver happened to be, at one time or another, a publicly listed company.

In fact, the Government Service Insurance System, or one believes GSIS, got so in love with the company, it bought more than 10 percent of furnisaver.

And the GSIS did more even further to check on its investments in furnisaver. It did not have a board seat.

GSIS just assigned its voting rights and all, well, to some ex-pat executives from the US parent from American Standard. One of them stayed in the five-class hotel? Not a house. Not a condo. A FIVE-STAR hotel!

I don't know, but the last time I checked, the money of the GSIS was still our money! I mean, you just don't flush it down the toilet, more toilet just like that!

* * *

NOT surprisingly, however, furnisaver had two stockholders for directors.

One was Wilson Ng, former chair of PSE, who also owns a stock brokerage company called Wealth Securities.

The other was Benjamin Yu, former president of Tagaytay Highlands, who also owns the brokerage Citi Solar.

They earned less than 10 percent each of furnisaver.

Why there two stockholders had board

Conrado R. Bernal III

seats in a listed company like furnisaver, with less than 10 percent, while GSIS had none with its more than 10 percent, is still one of the unexplained mysteries of the universe.

No wonder, the GSIS never figured out what hit it, when furnisaver declared insolvency.

For that matter, neither did the public who bought shares in the company. Nobody warned the public that furnisaver was in a deep s..t.

* * *

My word of warning ever came from the SEC or from the PSE, despite those two watchdogs sitting in the boardroom, board.

I mean, everybody kept quiet about the financial rumor of the toilet maker. It never showed in the financial statements. Who were its auditors, anyway?

* * *

BUT here is the biggest surprise of it all. furnisaver furnished it only closing down its manufacturing plant here. It is actually moving out as a marketing and sales outfit.

In other words, it will import everything it sells here. What else is new?

Nobody has anything against the closure of a manufacturing business here to switch to trading. It is a business decision.

But the closure of furnisavers raised some eyebrows, because reportedly it would only pay off "severance" problems. Small suppliers wouldn't be left out in the cold.

One of them is Ermita Gas, a small fuel dealer of Pereon, which filed criminal cases against the top officers of furnisavers.

Perdo value I gathered, furnisavers tapped Ermita Gas as supplier, for the first time, only several days before its closure.

As a result, after delivering some P6 million worth of fuel to furnisavers, Ermita Gas could not get payment of even a single cross-eyed centavo.

* * *

BUT the thing is, as Ermita Gas claimed in its case against the furnisavers executives, no company could close down its manufacturing plant overnight.

It had to be a long, tedious process of decision making, not to announce the payoff plan. Nothing else! Heck, they even plan for a party. What were the closers of a furnisaver!

That the executives knew for some time the company was going to close down, is a reasonable claim by Ermita Gas.

For indeed, furnisavers ordered the 90 million worth of furnisaver fixtures for last October, only several months before it closed down the plant.

What's more, Ermita Gas claimed that furnisavers forced it to make the final delivery in advance. Ermita Gas was scheduled to make the delivery on Nov. 27 but now, furnisavers forced it to deliver (the goods) on Nov. 20.

Why the rush? Why—the—hurry—like a day before the closure. We mean, furnisavers made the decision to close down only a few minutes after the delivery?

* * *

ERMITA Gas thinks that, because the 'Til Dem furnisaver knocked it out of operating a business here, the closure of the manufacturing plant was meant to deceive the creditors, particularly small helpless powerless suppliers like Ermita Gas.

On the same day furnisavers declared insolvency, its parent company American Standard issued a circular to the same dealers of furnisavers that it would open a new marketing and sales furnisaver.

In fact, American Standard already made reservations with the SEC on the name American Standard Philippines.

It even declared to the SEC that the supposedly "new" company was actually already an ongoing concern. Could it have been referring to furnisavers?

Look—the old and the new companies only happens to have the same controlling stockholders.

Mark McGee, as executive of furnisavers, who was one of only two officers authorized to transact business for the closed company, is also the one who announced the launching of the new trading furnisaver.

* * *

NOW here's the clincher. Ermita Gas said it had information that furnisavers removed its inventory from the plant in Las Piñas, meaning, many from the mall of candidates, pardon me, from the small suppliers.

Ermita Gas said that furnisavers moved the goods to a warehouse in Sta. Ana, Manila, through its longtime trucker called Mojave Transport.

It said that the same company probably moved also with their under the counter trading company.

And so furnisavers can only pay off P700 million of its debts, mainly to secured creditors. It claimed it has no money for the others.

But furnisavers was able to give out of its own, anyway a handsome separation package, it is said, to the toilets.

What kind of a lizard-stepping crime is that?

And how is American Standard going to lure its customers from now on under a new name? Maybe it does not care about its reputation anymore.

ING Investment expects robust stock market this year

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

ING Investment Management, a leading mutual fund manager in the country, said it remained bullish on the local stock market, which is being backed by improved double-digit growth in corporate earnings, despite the recent downgrade by Moody's Investors Service of the Philippine government's ratings.

Paul Joseph Garcia, chief investment officer of ING Investment Management Philippines, said the ING Group was overweight on the Philippines, which means that in terms of the investments it manages, it still allocates more exposure to the Philippines.

In fact Garcia said they expected the renewed Philippine composite stock index at 1,800, a 20-percent growth from the 1,832 level at the end of 2004. At best, the index can even reach 1,900 to 1,950.

The index has yet to regain its all-time high of 1,900 in 1997.

ING Investment Management is the trust department of ING Bank N.V. Manila and manages a range of mutual fund assets. About P1.5 billion of this is invested in equities.

Garcia also said that corporate earnings were expected to grow by 20 percent this year, although slower than the 30- to-35-percent expansion in corporate earnings last year.

"Companies that have export revenues have lower interest expenses and companies' efforts to clean up their dollar debt, which will be helped by a stronger peso, [is cited].

Earnings growth, however, will get hit by the expected slowdown in exports and agriculture will now have to be stressed, Garcia pointed out.

He added that the sectors that were likely to attract investors this year included property, with office vacancy rates dipping to single-digit levels recently, and banking, whose beneficiaries' prices of property are also likely to be enhanced with the renewed interest in the real estate segment.

ING Investment Management is the top mutual fund manager in the Asia-Pacific Region as reported by the Asia Asset Management Magazine last September.

Shares end lower . . .

Follow-through buying in early trade pushed the key index above 2,100 points but investors then chose to start looking to recent gains.

Turnover was 6.01 billion shares worth P1.86 billion. Losers led gainers 76 to 46, with 65 issues unchanged.

All sectoral indices, a strong mid-cap in past sessions, Metro Pacific and Benpres declined on profit-taking. Metro Pacific shed 2.1 percent to 6.5 centavos, while Benpres fell 3.7 percent to P5.32. "There is also profit-taking on the Metro Pacific's bidding for Benpres' stake in the North Luzon expressway project.

Ayala eyes listing . . .

Ayala Land, Inc. (ALI) is acquiring the electronics assets in Texas (California), Singapore and Cebu of Santa's Electronics and Engineering Co., a US-based electronics firm. This is expected to add 10 percent to ISM's present manufacturing capacity.

The asset purchase agreement was signed last Jan. 29. Among the assets were inventory, accounts receivable, contracts, fixed assets and intellectual property. ISM has offered employment to the personnel presented in Texas, Singapore and Cebu. Santa is based in Michigan.

Ayala Corp. (ayala) 75.8 percent of ISM. Another local electronics firm called Boston Inc. holds (boston) 19.7 percent.

ISM is mainly into electronics services in the Philippines with its manufacturing facility in Laguna. Bulk of its revenues are in the production of hard disks and optical disks.

DISCLOSURES

PEALA Corp. moved its annual stockholders' meeting from April 8 to 1, 2:30 p.m. at the Grand Ballroom of Manila Intercontinental Resorts, Makati City.

* * *

ELECTED officers at **Central Azucarrera de Tarlac** were Pedro Cojuangco, president and chair; Jesusmoso Reyes, vice president and treasurer; Jose Cojuangco Jr., VP; Ernesto Vasquez, VP; Nenes Mendoza, assistant vice president and assistant treasurer; Emmanuel Hechanova, AVP; Benedicto Lopez, secretary and Fernando Cojuangco, assistant secretary.

* * *

DMCI Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 29, 2 p.m. at the Diamond Room/Magallanes/Dato Leonardo Function Rooms of Makati Sports Club. Stockholders of record as of March 23 will be entitled to notice of and to vote at the meeting.

* * *

ACEN 91 (Philippines) Hotel Corp. declared missing information to explain the 49-percent drop of its stock price that lost by P1.80 from P3.6 each.

Compiled by Marissa B. Salvosa, PDI Research

BPI taps OFW remittances for microfinance program

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE ASIA Link of the Philippine Islands yesterday launched a pioneering lending window that seeks to channel remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to microfinancing.

In a press briefing, BPI president Aurelio Montinola III said the project, called "Padang sa Pilipo" (Dollar Account)," aims to fully overseas Filipinos to a savings mobilization program wherein they are encouraged to open a BPI dollar time deposit of at least $1,000.

The OFWs' dollar savings will be matched by the bank with pesos denominated funding to small enterprises. But instead of lending directly, the bank will channel it through 10 microfinancing institutions to administer the lending.

"We all know about the eight million Filipinos abroad that [is] $6.5 billion (in inward remittances) they send," Montinola said.

"The $1,000 (deposit) looks small, but if you add them up, it will have a big impact," he said.

He also noted that the new lending programs would likely be a good business, given the low delinquency rate of only 3-6 percent on microfinancing in the Philippines.

BPI signed yesterday a memorandum of understanding with the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NaFFAA) led by New Yorkbased Filipino executive Leda Nicolas-Lewis.

BSP GOVERNOR Rafael Buenaventura, National Federation of Filipino-American Associations chair Leda Nicolas-Lewis and Bank of the Philippine Islands president and CEO Aurelio Montinola III shake hands after the signing of the memorandum of understanding held at the BPI headoffice in Ayala, Makati (ANNIE ALPAS)

Montinola said at present, more than 80 percent of OFW remittances channeled through MB networks are directly going to consumption spending. He said a larger portion of these funds would be of better use if Filipino workers and their families were given a more permanent and viable source of livelihood.

"The family's dollar-mobilization campaign will use NaFFAA's 13 regional chapters as the first of its kind and BPI's more than 700 branches in the Philippines.

Lewis said overseas Filipinos, whom she calls "Global Pinoys," were keen on helping the country through investments but it would be too tedious for them to keep watch of these while staying abroad.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura lauded BPI's initiative, saying the poor deserved cheaper access to credit rather than Dar'ian dismal "five-six" street lending—wherein every P5 one borrows on a Monday P6 has to be paid by Friday.

"The poor pay interest that the middle class and (inflated?) much heavier than the rich," he said.

For this project, BPI Foundation will subsidize to Parangtig Amerikano Inc. an award-winning project began in 1988, which until 2002 had lent about P60 million to various non-profit organizations. The pooled loans ranged from P5,000 to P200,000, with an outstanding repayment rate of 95 percent.

NOW MORE ACCESSIBLE VIA THE GREENFIELD / MALITLIT EXIT

"When everything important to us is within reach, we know we've made the right decision."

Dr. Benjie Luna and daughter Ysobel
Ayala Westgrove Heights Homeowners

Growing up in the city, you simply get used to having everything within reach – schools, hospitals, shopping centers and public utilities. Everything is convenient and comfortable for you. That's why Benjie, a cardiologist, and his wife, Ginny, a flight attendant, initially had doubts about leaving their first home. But at the end of 2003, they decided to escape the squeeze that has enveloped their 3-bedroom condominium in Pasig City. More importantly, factories in the area have greatly contributed to the worsening air pollution. "We were really thinking of our daughters," Ginny said. "We want them to grow up in a cleaner, safer community."

That's always dreamed of living in a more natural environment. A place with plenty of trees, hills and wide open spaces where their children can freely roam around to play. But the thought of moving far from the familiar comforts of the city seemed impractical. Like many families, they have fallen into the "big city trap".

Then Benjie discovered Ayala Westgrove Heights through his daughter Ysobel's prep school principal. "He had just bought a lot and was so happy with his purchase," he said. Ayala Westgrove Heights, after all, is designed to be a self-contained community, similar to Ayala Alabang. All the necessary amenities are continuously being built around us: schools, hospitals, commercial centers, groceries, churches. Only 15 minutes away from Alabang, it is a sanctuary that does not isolate, but offers a chance to escape at the end of the day.

Inside, they are surrounded by lush mango groves and rolling hills. A cool climate is also perfect for outdoor family activities. Amenities like the gazebo, clubhouse and children's playground are enough to keep them home for entire weekends. "My daughters used to miss our old place in the city. But that's not the case now. They love everything here... waking up to beautiful views, playing with birds and chickens, and picking mangoes in our backyard," Ginny said.

The most important thing of course, is the fact that it has the Ayala Land pedigree. After Ayala Alabang, Benjie knows that Ayala Westgrove Heights is the Next Big Thing. And as they begin to grow their family roots here, they know that the basis of a wonderful future are simply within reach.

AYALA
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Tan group seen raising funds for Del Monte Pacific bid

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE LUCIO TAN group is considering tapping the debt market such manner its bid to acquire a controlling stake in Del Monte Pacific Ltd., officials from the group told the business newspaper BusinessWorld.

"We are looking for money but there was definite interest yet," said Harry Tan, director at Bank Holdings Corp., the holding company of the Lucio Tan Group of companies.

The Tan Group, through Bank Holdings Corp., submitted the highest offer for a 40-percent stake in Del Monte Pacific, a company listed in Singapore but whose manufacturing operations are in the Philippines. The stake, which is valued at about $1.75 billion/dollars, is being sold by current owner Italian Food maker Cirio Finanziaria S.p.A.

Officials, however, said the Tan Group was not in a rush to borrow from the debt markets at this time, especially with the recent downgrading of the country's credit ratings by Moody's Investors Service. The downgrade will make the cost of borrowings more expensive.

Other parties that have expressed interest in Cirio's stake in Del Monte Pacific were food and beverage giant San Miguel Corp., which had submitted a condition-al offer; United Laboratories Group of the Campos family and Yamaharu Group of Japan.

MGI Inc., the holding company of the Lucio family and an existing shareholder of Del Monte Pacific, has preemptive rights over Cirio's holdings, which means it can match the final offer for the said stake. The Lucio-led (12) percent stake in Del Monte Pacific.

Cirio earlier defaulted on more than 1 billion euros in debts, approximately $1.35 billion, and is now being liquidated.

Cirio earlier accepted the offer of tobacco magnate Lucio Tan to buy out its 40 percent stake in the company. However, Cirio and the Tan group have yet to negotiate and enter into a definitive agreement.

"There is also an executory clause in mandatory general offer for Del Monte Pacific shares will take place," Del Monte Pacific said in boursa fair disclosure.

Analysts said the Lucio Tan group might be able to mount a tender offer if the deal would be structured in such a way that it would end up buying a holding company instead of directly acquiring the firm shares in Del Monte Pacific.

The Lucio Tan group of companies include Fortune Tobacco, Asia Brewery Inc., Allied Banking Corp., Philippine Airlines, Philippine National Bank and University of the East.

AN AERIAL view shows the newest international airport in central Japan currently under construction on reclaimed land in Tokoname, Aichi prefecture, about 35 kilometers (21.8 miles) south of Nagoya. The airport, equipped with a 3,500 meters (2.2 miles) runway, is scheduled to open on February 17. AFP

Acer moves to regain lead in RP market

By Konrad W. Domingo

COMPUTER BRIDGE Acer Philippines Inc. (APIC) expects sales to double to P1 billion this year as it pushes hard to regain market leadership in the country, company officials said yesterday.

Ferdinand T. Swim, APIC business development manager, said in a press briefing the company hopes to repeat its performance last year when sales doubled to P500 million, just a few years after the Acer group realigned its businesses in 2000.

That year, Acer spun off is manufacturing operations — now known as Wistron — to focus on the marketing of its brand name products that include desktop and mobile personal computers, servers and storage, displays, peripherals and e-business solutions for businesses, government, education and home users.

"We expect our best selling notebooks to be the main driver for our sales growth projection," Patricio said.

APIC general manager Manuel L. Wang said the company had much room for growth in the country where Taiwan based Acer Inc. is performing the weakest in Southeast Asia.

"Overall, we hold the fifth or sixth rank in the local market — one mostly dominated by the IBM and Dell brands — but we believe we can improve to third within the year," Wang said.

Not blinds, Acer says it ranks among the top two branded PC vendors nationwide while it supports dealers and distributors in over 300 countries. Revenues reached $13.6 billion in 2003.

Acer first entered the Philippine market in 1992 "under its commitment to answer the market's computing needs in the most cost-effective way."

Among the firm's long clients are the Asian Development Bank, Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co., Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co., Bank of the Philippine Islands, the Department of Education and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

Food processors seeking sugar allocation

FOOD processors, mostly small- and medium-scale, are seeking the revival of an earlier arrangement with sugar producers that granted the industry specific sugar allocation and price discounts.

The Philippine Food Processors and Exporters Organization Inc. (PhilFoodex), speaking for its 250 members, said such an arrangement would enable the industry to do away with importation.

Philfoodex director Eduard Tordil said the group would ask the Sugar Regulatory Authority and sugar producers to allocate 1 to 2 percent of the local production for the industry's food industry. The commodity, he added, should be competitively against imports, which now cost about P1,000 to P1,100 per 50-kilogram bag.

If priority sugar producers earmark 10 percent of their production but only for food processors that export their products, said SRA Administrator Jaime Christopher Cardenas.

Ledesma said that in the past, Philfoodex was given a half-percent allocation of local sugar production priced at only P700 per bag for food processors catering to both the domestic and export markets.

"This program with Philfoodex was underutilized and we decided to scrape for the current crop year. If they want to revive this, it has to be discussed with the farmers," he said.

Its said operational problems in the previous program led to be addressed first.

The country's sugar output for crop year 2004 went up 8.2 percent to 2.339 million metric tons (MMT) over the previous crop year's 2.162 MMT. About 89.5 percent of the total output was classified "B" or domestic sugar for local consumption.

A Beautiful [R]evolution

Introducing the new Toyota Innova

INNOVA family weekend

INNOVA LAUNCH ON ASAP '05!

Watch out for the launching of the Innova on ABS-CBN Channel 2's ASAP '05. February 20, 2005

BUSINESS

BIR goes after delinquent cell phone card dealers

By Michelle V. Rono

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue will require telecommunication companies to tell cellular phone cards only to legitimate dealers.

In speech Solomon Hu, commissioner of the underground cell phone card distribution business has been depriving the government of needed tax revenue.

Revenue Deputy Commissioner Lilia Guillermo said the BIR would issue a memorandum circular next week directing telecommunications, Smart Communications and Sun Cellular—to require dealers first show their tax identification numbers (TINs) and permit of BIR registration before selling them phone cards.

"This move will force dealers to register their businesses; once registered, they will be included in our taxpayers database," Guillermo said in an interview with reporters.

She said that upon inclusion in the BIR's database, the cell card dealers' tax remittance could be easily covered in the regular scrutiny by revenue personnel.

Revenue officers recently met with cell card distributors to discuss with them the results of a BIR study showing disproportion between their tax liabilities and actual payments in 2003. Guillermo estimated that the BIR lost around P64 billion that year due to tax delinquency of the cellular distribution industry.

In the meeting, the BIR told the cell card dealers to immediately rectify their tax payments in the previous years or face legal action.

According to the BIR study, 26 of the 80 cellular cell card dealers generated gross sales of over P1 billion each in 2003, while 4 earned between P500 million and P1 billion. A total of 18 sold cell cards worth between P100 million and P500 million, while five had gross sales worth P50 million to P100 million. Twelve recorded gross sales of between P10 million and P50 million, and 10 of them had gross sales of less than P10 million.

Despite the huge amount of sales, the BIR study also showed that more than half, or 45, of the sample dealers paid only token withholding taxes (amount of their gross sales, while 19 declared they had to tax due at all because of "very low" sales. The rest paid taxes equivalent to only 5 percent of their revenues or lower.

This means that the BIR lost huge amounts from the supposed 10-percent value-added tax and income tax.

The gross sales of each cell card distributor were determined through the Relief (reconciliation of listings) for enforcement matching system.

Relief uses third-party information to determine one's revenues. In this case, the BIR used sales reports of telcos and list of merchandise by clients to determine the gross revenues of the cell card dealers.

The crackdown on illegitimate and tax-delinquent cell card dealers is part of the programs of the Business Intelligence Task Force of the BIR. The task force was put up to make a thorough study on the level of tax compliance (or delinquency) of selected industries. The task force uses the latest auditing system as well as industry benchmarks as resources to determine one's tax liabilities and match it with the amount of its actual tax remittances.

Aside from cell card distributors, the BIR task force has also started auditing medical and legal professionals, providers of manpower services, and advertising companies. Earlier, the BIR said it was set to conduct lifestyle check on doctors.

The BIR, which accounts for over 60 percent of the government's revenue collection, is tasked to collect P596.4 billion, up from P470 billion last year.

2 semiconductor projects get incentives

By Konrad W. Domingo

THE BOARD of Investments yesterday said it had approved incentive packages for two semiconductor projects worth a total of P16.6 billion.

One project was Analog Devices (Philippines) Inc.'s proposed facility for the production of wireless modules for use in aerospace projects.

ADPI's P15-billion plant would create 66 jobs for skilled workers who live near the firm's existing plant site in Parañaque City.

The BOI said the project was granted a pioneer status because this would be the first time that aerospace products would be made in the country.

ADPI is an affiliate of United States-based Analog Devices Inc., which designs, makes and markets high-performance integrated circuits used for a wide range of signal processing uses.

Among the biggest company's product line is the aerospace products group, which is dedicated to support manned space flight and satellite applications as well as the long-range support of the space market.

In support of the growing importance of this business segment, ADPI put up the aerospace assembly and test lines, which are dedicated to the production of a kind of integrated circuits known as "aerospace products."

Another project, SCS Philippines Inc.'s P1.09-billion facility, is meant for the final manufacturing stages of analog and logic integrated circuits for its parent, its wholly-based member firm in the semiconductor.

SCS' Philippines' new project would be set up in its existing plant site in Carmona, Cavite, and would create 95 jobs.

While probing in the line may in semiconductor manufacturing, when makes are electrically tested to detect electrical functionality and manufacturing defects. Assembly and tests complete the integrated circuit production process.

DOTC budget for foreign-assisted projects slashed by 30%

By Cielnas S. Bades

THE DEPARTMENT of Transportation has slashed by 30 percent its budget for foreign-assisted projects this year to P2.36 billion from P3.05 billion in 2004.

The move was in line with calls of the budget and finance departments for fiscal prudence in spending.

"Because of the huge budget deficit, the DOTC reduced its infrastructure budget this year," said Transportation Undersecretary Rolando Dalmacion in an interview.

The lowering of the budget for projects covered by official development assistance may endanger the prospects of pending foreign-assisted contracts, including the P2.02-billion capacity expansion of the Light Railway Transit Line 1, according to the undersecretary.

Next year, the agency's budget for foreign-assisted projects would go up again to P3.1 billion but the amount had been committed to big-ticket undertakings. Foreign-assisted projects require counterpart funding from the national government.

Transport Secretary Leandro Mendoza said, in an earlier statement, that because of the tight budget, the agency would only provide a P421-million counterpart funding for the LRT Line 1 expansion.

He said next year's budget was only enough to cover two foreign-assisted projects, which include the New Bicutan Depot, the New Integrated Transport Project, the Social Reform-Related Feeder Ports, and the LRT Line 2 extension.

The Japan Bank for International Cooperation had been pushing for the completion of the P9-billion capacity expansion of LRT 1. JBIC said availing the completion of LRT 1 expansion would cost the government P600 million in additional interest payment yearly.

JBIC has 1.8 billion yen for the project.

JBIC chief representative to the Philippines Osamu Shimizu said completing the expansion would ease commuter travel around Metro Manila and would set the stage for the extension of the Monumento-Bacoor line to Cavite.

JBIC claimed that Mitshina had given its go-ahead to the awarding of the Line 1 expansion contract to Hanjin-ete Corp. and Hyuka Corp.

The Japanese financial institution "urged the Philippine government to proceed with the expansion program as soon as possible because further delays would end the government P500 million a year."

Behind the velvet rope burn

Who gets in the VIP lounge? Who doesn't? And why do people care so freakin' much anyway?

ALMOST everyone who's ever tried to get into a club—hell knows we have—has a damned outrageous story. Trust me, I know first-hand.

During my years as a nocturnal flyer on the social circuit, I've seen, heard and experienced enough dramedy while stepping into a club to fill about (the tabloid will) some degree of know-how. Or bullshit, depending on how you see things. Admittedly, there are one too many times I've either forged but I'll disclose one story, all for the sake of a evening. If not believe, read. I'm you. I'll continue this preface by running through the gamut of choices you avoid (typically) (and bedded) outside any night spot of the second.

Age against the machine

Gino de la Paz

Three again. Said that thought.

It would be so much better if I focused instead on the people you'll encounter third-hundred outside any night spot of the second. I'm talking, of course, about VIPs. Movie? Who the hell are these VIPs and how do they get past the doormen? Hang on. We'll get to them in a bit.

In the meantime, allow me to make this scenario even more vivid. It's Friday. Half-past midnight. Any club or bar with a repute, best for ragtag parties, fifty or so essentially optimistic lads wait behind the velvet rope. Some desperate souls complain on their cell phones about the stupid-ass queues. (If it's in Manila, they'd also Globe about the heat. And maybe parking, and Smart. Be sure have the attention span for this?) The rest are content to dismiss some rude to the receptionist's desk and finally get get to the club.

Suddenly, in your lazy peripheral vision, you see the door staff unhook the clasp of the rope, letting in obscene number of models and a hostess to the VIP lounge. He nodding. We parting. He questions asked. And so, amidst the cursing, teeth-dropping and blowing of unwelcomed smoke, the velvet Nazi announces to the crowd, "You have to be on the guest list!" That makes mentally bewildered you shamelessly wonder, "Who did they have to sleep with to get on that list?" after a few seconds of that. Bull-and-rodeo-fucked thought, however, you start to conjecture. "Who do I have to sleep with to get on that list?" Ah, if only life were that simple.

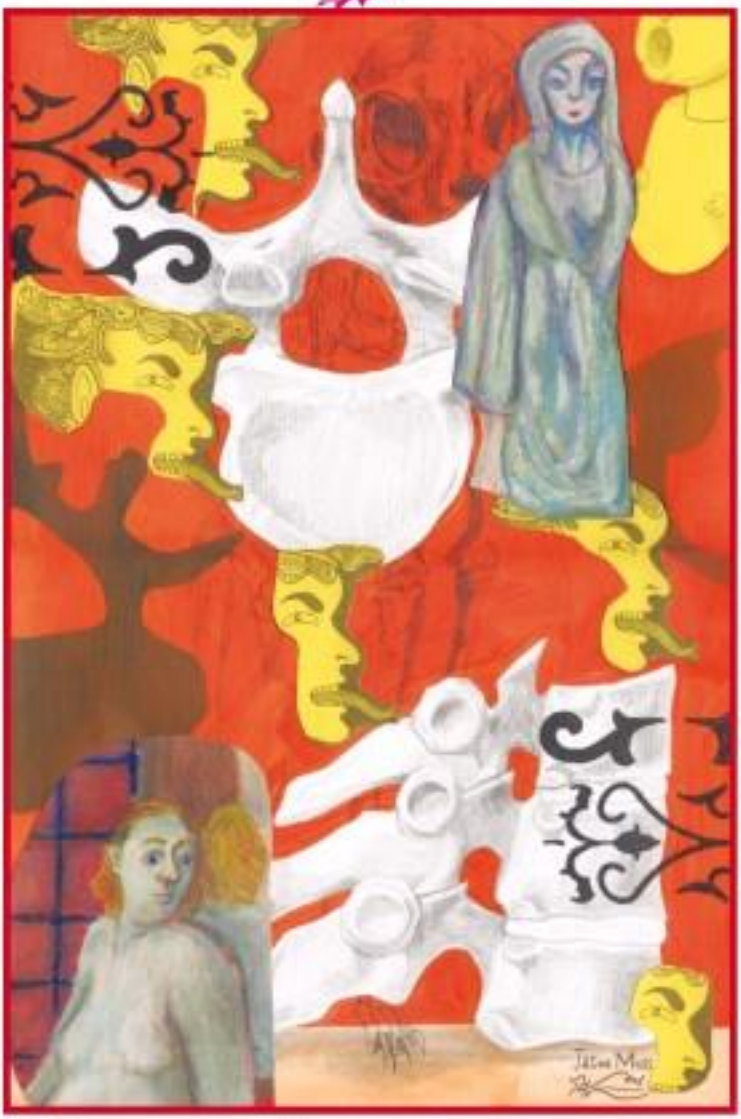
See, in a town where an obsession with absolutely everyone with a hint-of-a-hint of popularity, the notion of getting on (and-a-list) makes for an interesting topic. (That and the hot-bunk Deanna? *applaud.*) But carrying on, how does a club's velvet rope manage to incite such a gamut of emotions in usually sensible (-ish) citizens? More telling, why?

Learning the ropes

The velvet rope came about sometime in the late '70s, when uppity clubs in New York City such as El Morocco and the Studio 54 used it to let the public know what to expect inside: a formal dress code and a dinner bill amounting to two weeks' salary for ordinary Americans. It was simply a sort-to-two-finger back then; You could either afford it or you couldn't.

Velvet rope politics evolved in 1977, however, when Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager opened the door to Studio 54. (Yes, the same one in the spectacularly bad Ryan Phillippe-Neve Campbell movie.) This time, the rope wasn't used to exacerbate those who couldn't afford what was behind it. Rather, Studio 54 turned crossing the rope into a challenge to welcome many people who thought they were beautiful, fabulous or outrageous enough to enter the near-legendary establishment. For the first time in nightlife history, dancing the night away wasn't a class-conscious thing. At last, celebrities had the opportunity to mingle with bridge-and-tunnel people from Jersey who, in turn, had the chance to mingle with the rich and famous on amphetamines, but then everyone's there to!

But with the advent of the '80s came fresh-scented yuppies. And along with that came more clubs that people could hit. Somewhere in between was the subsequent demise of Studio 54. Hence, the idea of the velvet rope started to live from both sides. Establishments especially had to raise the stakes to be eagle-



Cut the crop

In a crowd of self-declared next-big-things, how do you stand out?

By Pam Pastor
Original artwork by Jason Mora

Helen Parr: Everybody is special, Dash.
Dash Parr: That's just another way of saying nobody is.

–The Incredibles

ALL IT took was a blue feather. While filming a documentary about the mating rituals of animals, the filmmakers attached a blue feather to a male bird. When he flew back to the tree, the she-birds flocked around him, clamoring for his attention and ignoring the rest of the males. One feather—that's all it took for him to stand out.

Unfortunately, in the real world, accessorizing is not enough.

The generation is made up of individuals who take pride in being unique. Everyone thinks they're different. And if everyone is different, then everyone's the same.

Weird has become normal. Unusual has become ordinary.

A gazillion people call themselves models. A gazillion people call themselves DJs. A gazillion people call themselves VJs. A gazillion people call themselves artists. A gazillion people call themselves stars. And these are gazillions more who are aspiring to be models, DJs, VJs, artists, stars.

The world has become overpopulated with self-declared next-big-things.

Oh yes, the drumming never ends.

But when does the drumming stop and the reality begin?

When you get noticed.

And how do you get noticed when everyone else is scrambling for attention? That's the gazillion-dollar question.

Should you change your name? Should you make like Cher and drop your last name? Should you do the Jennifer? Ja? Jenny from the Block thing and change your name more often than you change spouses? Should you set aside your real self and opt for one that people can actually remember like the other Jennifer who changed her original Anastasia to Aniston? That's totally up to you. We suggest that you forget about adopting Asian Hollywood names though—look at what it did to Rizavna Barnes' career.

Should you get tattoos and piercings? Maybe not. They're so 90s, they're sooo Jesse your resident Gabbali-reader has them.

Should you sleep with the director or director? The question is—which one?

Should you release your own sex video? It worked for Paris Hilton. It didn't work for Rizal. Will it work for you? Tip #1 – at least make sure that you look good naked. Tip #2 – sleep therunder.

Should you get a newspaper column? Just make sure it's in a paper that people actually read.

Should you create controversy? Beat someone up, crash your car, jump into a bloody, destructive relationship with another hot-as-hell celebrity? Not if you want to hold onto your dignity.

Should you pretend you're straight? Maybe going to the strip to get. Your sexuality should be like your shoes. It's just there—don't flaunt it, don't hide it.

Thankfully, there is no single route to success, no definite path for success.

People have achieved it countless times without ever even trying. Some were born into it, some just walk in the mall and are picked/found.

But those who really make it have what it takes. Substance. Talent. Star power. Or at least really good agents.

Not everyone has to be a VJ, a DJ, a model, a writer or a nun.

There must be something you're really good at. Maybe you execute the best curveball. Hit the highest notes. Write the most beautiful songs. Throw the best parties. Cook the yummiest spaghetti. Sew the greatest skirts. Throw the perfect shots. Come up with the funniest punchlines. Take the most amazing photos.

So forget the name change, forget the tattoos, forget the piercings and the sex videos. Stand by your sexuality, stay away from controversies and don't sleep with the director (unless you really want to).

Find your blue feather and dress the people in. But things shouldn't end there. Find out what you have that keeps them interested, that holds them captive. And when you do, unleash it, let it shine. That's how you make the final cut.

Behind the velvet . . .

Continued from C1

time game. And so it came to pass in 1995 that Rhodes&Gor (get that—Rhoda&Gor) launched its new line of vacation-wear: the VIP lounge.

The New Promised Land

Slightly elevated, the velvet rope moved into a music façade of schizophrenia. Partying, you think, achieved further from unwieldy mingling into a state of togetherness in Rhoda&Gor's VIP lounge. Consequently, Joan felt her soul lift too also, because unceasingly aware of letting in fewer other than those that belonged to the monied elite of wild, suburban who'd come to raise the roof. It was all about ushering people to express capacities of earth-strength." Truth, apparently. Which surely brings me back to my point. Once again, who the hell are these VIPs and how do they get past the doorman?

A part from celebrities, this enhanced velvet rope mentality now encompassed a new class of very important party people: the people who work with and for celebrities—the managers, the magazine editors, the publicists, the accountants. Concerned to admit, I have you and? The press, eventually, and anybody with cash who loves drinking and fashion-shopping parties. The ones that make up the fresh kind of glamour are those most likely to be snapped by the paparazzi. High-profile consumers plus fashionable expatiate great photos equals even greater gossip. All in all, the new wave is socially packaged in formula.

As (unsure as these economic-conservatives may sound), a downturn from New York City's Hamptons. It appears that the people most likely to get in are "Page Six" celebrities, people with good looks, and socialites. Christopher Getwell Sony Esquire is on first-name basis with such ubiquitous celebrations as Ivana and Ricky Hilton, Lauren Bush and Casey Johnson, the of the Johnson & Johnson empire.) On the other hand, Chi Swarthmore in IAL White Lotus try. But if you try to get in with "Page Six" power with gold-flakes and FUBU-logo's," Word.

Open Sesame, Or How to Detect Barbarians at the Gate

Personally, I've noticed that most authentic people these days have a vaguely antagonistic sense of entitlement, especially when they don't possess the required (aka a celebrity bride) pass. Hint to break this, you just have to work that way.

Abbreviated as I can it's a New York issue that can be thing. "Could you please? they should be looked like? DNC," she cleverness. Is a straight lie "to" such a bad thing? Or is it a social balancing-condition? People

avoid to be accepted nowadays whom others aren't expected, or to do things that others couldn't," says Norbert Leo, Ph.D., professor of sociology at Connecticut College). "We create dichotomies grafting [into] book accepted by a permanent public status. For others, getting into a club. "For me, it's making fun of people who think they should be treated like VIPs. Women can be a problem like, you know, as can it with men—than that."

If the velvet rope experience is indeed divided over exclusivity and being perceived as elite, is there a left coast to stepping into the bright lights Hollywood-esque affairs? When it comes to gala events and starry-eyed, there's a world of difference between professional hopefuls' armies and hedonists at the gate. So if you can't get in on the Academy Awards, the Grammys, the Emmys, a range of that kind of celebration, here are a few things to remember—and consider doing for the gate—when leveraging your A-game to the front:

1 **There are things your bouncer does from queue, unpack beautifully.**

Course ball, high-order, to a bouncer-family, the hunky dude-arbiter-VIP room: you check-in-or-out, other the following.

a) Don't you know who I am?

b) Don't you know who I am . . . who?

Obviously, the bad blood can seem outdated already: persons those questions, murdering them rhetorical and you, a mark one someone. Can't even get a bone up because others complicated or quick. Because, if you really insist, go ahead and pose such questions until your in-whom-I-spoke-of. The experience will be drastically damaged—for the bouncer. But or—as it's seen to you from a head-clearing laugh, which is fundamental after a night of dealing with someone like you.

2 **The bouncer doesn't care if you're Kirsten Dunst.**

Have you ever attempted to ride the bouncer's mind more than [censored]? As any veteran and hyphen knows, to bring the doormen with steady (or casual) [blank] won't get you anywhere. Except where you originally were. What's, in this case, would still be any where number-VIP area. By the way, angry retorts, curses-laced beatings and overall attempts at making loud accost will be avoided by many security aides.

3 **Know his hot-hand, that's all you.**

Situated in a D.C. entrance is. Bakers are also aware that choosing your "entitlement" by declaring how much cash you intend to risk at the establishment could potentially. Today, lucky Lucky.

Stay. Here is a newly-updated important for whatever friends—who normally talk about chosen—overboard a spooned early-grand sum. "I'll lose four bottles of champagne if you [blank] up!" Now coming as all drinks were on the house that night, that tough guy remark made this also a much-hard guide rather impossible: a check that included a rock star. Now, that this supposed team-around-to capture that moment, their pockets would not have slightly less than pillowcase words, and, in fact, would've wanted just one. Lucky.

4 **Don't look like VIP lounge like it's some sort of . . . VIP lounge.**

Slumping. Smoking. Drinking. More slumping. Even if it's frequented by your ex-Wally boss-guy, clearly who work at fashion magazines, over-exhibited [blank] by women who are weighed within [blank] and who on her lap, reclining on a table eating chocolates, the VIP lounge can get pre-packed, too. By clubbing crowd, official. When that happens, the environment then becomes more desirable. Because really, no one wants to be in a room where everyone is miserable and being hard-to-get. And that's almost look like closing promotions in the lounge. So no matter how those numbers behave, they were better than you. Remember. Lines outside. Area inside. Weird. And. Where you are to not very [blank] VIP area.

5 **Every party has its people.**

Don't forgetting also that VIP lounge is really your resource file: you're looking to control the table between another one you go with clients like a VIP lounge that clients you access. (Each bottle over Rule of 1-4-20 is in the least. I really have like no moderate about) your numerous status. The party's over? Leave be time for you to finally set your house, do time from those gazebos and go hang yourself. . . [with] celebrities.

BLINDFOLD'D. The excitement of things unseen. . . .

O-FINALLY SPOTTED. G-to-be on last Proenza in marriage

G Tongi's wet shower!

HERE with model her groom Tim Walters in Frederick Parsley

WHAT: G Tongi's bridal shower. Bit lavish by standard Joey Mead. As we all know, G Tongi is getting married to Tim Walters. Their rehearsal was at the Heaven sponsored to toddler last month.

WHO: G's many, very close friends. Zaddi from—Joey, there were Claudine Tribe Hobb, Dyan Castellas, Celine Lopez, Christine Son Diego, AKA Pierce, VP all gather to eat and play hymns to toast the soon-to-be Mrs. Walters.

WHERE: At Paddy Carmona's bachelor's pad in West Hook.

WHEN: Today—it's her wedding day at exclusive Barnacle resort. Niami where very retired guests get an celebration talk Tim and Giselle on they need to their new life together. Cheers! —Tim Day

Super
style . urban living . pop culture . entertainment . recreation

Super!'s Guide to Two Mushy Films

By Pepe Diokno
and Jamez Gabriel

"LET THE Love Begin" screenlovers Angel Locsin and Richard Gutierrez

These Valentine releases are still making the rounds of local cinemas . . . God help us all

V-DAY'S up, ladies and gentlemen—the standup runs is over. Unfortunately, our top network Valentine releases are still making their rounds of local cinemas. God help us all.

Now assuming you have not seen either "Let the Love Begin" or "Dreamboy," bless you. But if you must, go lose yourself anointed and living with you a copy of Super!'s Guide to Two Mushy Films.

These two films have been pitted against each other over and over again. But we aren't going to do that. Bring Piolo against Richard and Angel against Sam—Piolo might cripple himself. Instead, we're just going to put it all on the table—you decide, peeps.

However, we reserve the right to hand out awards.

Dreamboy

Alex Pido Pascual and Bea Alonzo

• Watch it because...

• It's different

• The screenwriter's awesome sans

• You'll see MTV VJ Dan Ignacio (Dans Time finally doing what he wants)

• It has the best ending ever(in it's the world (well, maybe))

• ... of Mico Palanca's nude

• ... of Jackie Castillejo (in the Chevalier of Dust Cauldron!)

• ... of Julia Garcia

• ... of AJ Dee

• ... of the cute dolphins in Subic

• Dido plays three "different characters"—a rich guy, a poor guy, and one who's right in the middle. (He just reminded)

• Don't watch it because...

• There is no chemistry

• ... of the stupid shampoo plug)

• It resembles into the film you get it already

• ... of Camille Pano' braces

• ... of Camille Pano' voice

• ... of Camille Pano' makeup

• There's a song and dance number at the top of the film (Really)

• ... of the Pido-Bea 'Mr. T' shirt-Cannot (well...)

• Then Willie plays the mind same character we did in last year's "So Happy Together"

• ... of Bea Alonzo—stop saying the-on act, everybody.

Ratings:

Pepe: ½
Jamez: ½

Let the Love Begin

Aces Richard Gutierrez and Angel Locsin, and Mark Herras and Jennylyn Mercado. Only three are given top billing, so do not know!

Watch it because...

• What it looks to come it makeup for in chemistry

• ... of Tuesday Vargas in Wednesday Vargas role ...)

• ... of Geoff Eigbuk (GET U) Your report, soon to be ADN Chanlogic titles!)

• Richard gets a scholarship at UCLA (only in the movies...)

• Angel Locsin has a swimming pool scene

• It's a GMA Films comeback

• Hey, I've never seen Richard and Angel together before!

• Mark and Jennylyn together before!

• It does have the fifty bares (Don't watch it because ...

• Richard Gutierrez is supposed to be a plumber

• Angel Locsin is supposed to be a business woman

• ... of Mark and Jennylyn (Eyes and Eyes of the Year)

• ... of Piolo Conde

• There is no song and dance number. There is no song and dance number

• The ending is exactly like the endings of all the other Effy Lowe's cheesy movies. (A girl, A guy, a field. Puto ran)

Ratings:

Pepe: ½ (because it did fulfill its Valentine's movie purpose)
Jamez: ½

Awards!

Best actor: AJ Dee (because we don't know you but people were shouting your name)

Best Child Actress: Bea Alonzo

Best Senior Citizen in a Forty-something Woman Role: Janice Camillejo

Best Ice Swimsuit: Angel Locsin

Best Use of the Days of the Week: Tuesday Vargas

Best Line: "Pag ang Aklat nakatakda, nakatakda lang talaga pa!"

Best Robin Padilla Impersonation: Piolo Pascual (you should see it—he acts, looks and sounds exactly like Robin Padilla)

Best Male Impersonation: Piolo Pascual (almost believable, we must say)

Best Supporting Cast in an Ensemble: "Let the Love Begin"

Best Unclean Chemistry: Mark and Jennylyn

Best Rare: Piolo Conde (well, at least we gave you something)

Happy Dirk Hardaway Award: Camille Pano (we can still see the baby fat)

Most Condescending: Richard Gutierrez (you made us believe you were cold, now you make us believe you're a plumber)

Best Movie: "Dreamboy"

Best Direction: Mac Alejandre

Longest Name Award (just to balance the awards out): "Let the Love Begin"

"DREAMBOY" screenlovers like screenlover shampoo commercial. (From left) Bea Alonzo's hair, Bea Alonzo and Piolo Pascual

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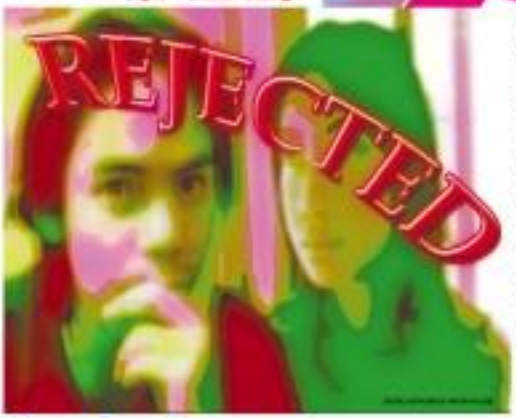

You had me at 'Hell, no!'

Man about town

Chuck Dy

Dear Man About Town,

I am a 32-year-old heterosexual male who lives in Metro Manila. I think I am pretty good looking (at least my ex-colleagues have told me so), and I have been told that I have a great personality. I consider myself intelligent and funny, and I have had a steady job ever since I graduated from college.

The reason I am telling you all this is because—at the risk of sounding immature—I think I stand a fairly good chance of successfully courting a girl when I put my mind to it. In the past, I have never had much of a problem with women. But the sole reason, there is this one girl whom I have been trying to court for several months now, but she just keeps on rejecting me!

To be honest, she's not half as attractive as my other girlfriends, so my friends tell me to just give it up and look for someone more my "standard." But the more she rejects me, the more I want her! Is this just some "new quest" thing?

Ah, yes! Sometimes memories remind me of my own mistakes in the past. Like when I recall my first boyfriend in college. I remember the dusky cheeks of tender coffee grounds abandoned by their lovers, wanting to be discarded, embraced only by the diaphanous fillet of cream slips.

In the tender age of five, a classmate with curly hair, dimpled cheeks and an olive complexion kissed me on the cheek, right in front of my crush. I was mortified, and my young heart was broken.

Whereupon, in an atmosphere such a penchant for doling out self-pity is said to be at its highest, my father (Hail, the deceased no less!) answers those nights of after-dinner phone calls, by informing me that she had a new boyfriend who drives a moped.

At twenty-four, a German student Mesmerized me. She seemed infatuated enough to announce by admitting that she had a family back in Berlin. Hope they get this mail back up, you crazy Kraut!

Many more rejections have followed and many more are sure to come. Just being emotionally rebuffed is like having your teeth pulled by a drunken—the bad class actually hurt, and after that it's just a swollen numbness, lots of spitting, and bits of incongruous giggling.

I really enjoyed reading your letter, by the way, particularly your attempt to analyze a modicum of self-respect by enumerating your selling points. Good-looking, great personality, intelligent, funny, responsible enough to maintain consistent employment, ADD (attractional? Absolute? It only takes a good looking, affable, intelligent, I guess, even with employment history of, err, 0 to be perfect?

Just not into you

In a celebrated episode of Sex and the City, Miranda, upon inquiring as to the thought process behind a man who wasn't calling her, is blunt by offered the suggestion that, maybe, "he's just not that into you."

There are millions of unsuccessful people in NOT find each other attractive, and that phrase encapsulates those two, savage lines into a expedient, five-syllable synopsis. Lack of physical attraction, unsuitable ideology, unacceptable personal hygiene, boredom, friends are bitches, family reputation is unsavory, quotes from The Alchemist, socially inept, sexually inadequate, he's dating Lucinda, drools, quote counting syndrome, refuses to read books without pictures, or has seen Titanic more than once. Whatever the specific issue in the realms of a potential romance, "she's just not that into you" summarizes them all into one convenient statement labeled "Denial."

Simple maths: no matter how good you are, most folks on paper, sometimes you still won't get the job. People are attracted to each other for the same sense of instinct; automatically they are occasionally repelled by factors beyond obvious identification.

It is possible that you have entrusted yourself quite accurately gauging your market value according to an objective census of your looks, personality and what you have to offer in a relationship. Then again, maybe you've been spending too much time looking at your ex-wife's photo—and we all know how imprecise numerical opinions can be. My mother thinks I will remain single (which I do, mais, which I don't).

You could attempt the direct approach and simply ask the object of your frustrated affection, but...

Do you really want to know why she's not into you? Are you man enough to sit across the table from a woman and listen to her enumerate your character flaws? I once made that mistake and asked a girl why she couldn't reciprocate my love. She informed me that I smelled of cod, drunkard! Darryl Hannah has a way of humbling your self-esteem for the rest of your life.

Illusion of an ego

I say BAH, man! Cut your losses and run! At least you have such fine illusion of dignity and an ego, albeit a little bruised. But can still retreat itself with comforting clichés and idiots, blaming everything from humanity to a sign from God that you were meant for someone better, someone sweet-but-not-too-hot (cloudy like Bedding-style) on a summer afternoon, and about to inherit Delaware. Someone who appreciates the scent of cod, damn it!

Of course, we have not yet discussed the fascinating concept of The Benchmarks. Ever since primitive man looked up at the

The more she rejects me, the more I want her

You had me at 'Hell, no!'

From page C3

blazing curtain of stars overhead and realized the vast potential of a virgin universe waiting to be exploited, we've been hungering for what we don't, or can't, have—often with dire consequences.

That one fruit

If Adam and Eve had just been satisfied with their buffet of everything-except-this-one-fruit, "global warming" might have meant bikini-clad Scandinavian models on a perennial world tour of goodwill. (This biblical gem goes a long way in disproving Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, as a monkey would have listened to God).

We misconstrue the notions of achievement, challenge, conquest and possession. We confuse curiosity for greed. We desire that 40 GB iPod, or that jacket from Mango, or that girl who refuses to be seduced by our charms. And not for utility, love or any practical purpose, mind you.

We are compelled because it is in our nature to be compelled. We are creatures of mastery, both man and woman, and we do not sleep well at night unless we are satisfied that we have exhausted all resources and means in the response of a challenge.

Logic has little to do with any of this, because a more primal motor drives us, one that is not native to either cranial hemisphere. The world's wealthiest businessmen do not need another million dollars, but they'll close the deal anyway because it's in their blood. It does not appeal to common sense to surf thirty-foot waves in hurricane weather but giant-riders will do so in allegiance to a higher reasoning than reason.

Sour grapes

This is true of courtship as well. Both men and women alike are intrigued by what they can't have, are absorbed by the challenge of forbidden fruit or grapes on a high vine. We climb mountains, simply because they are there.

The dangers of scaling a fantasy are, 1) that we have misappropriated our emotion toward the concept of a challenge and not an actual person, and 2) that the reality is often a disenchanting tangle of bad breath and amazingly lame taste in pop music that we're stuck with until the next castle in the sky catches our fancy.

In your case, it certainly seems that you are titillated (what a word) by the challenge of the unattainable. You have to ask yourself in all honesty are you interested in this girl, or infatuated by the idea of conquest? Because if it's the latter, then you're better off just conserving your energies for someone you're really interested in. Respect her decision and back off.

There is a very fine line between the sweet persistence of a rejected amour and the criminal nature of a stalker. Treat people as equals and not objectives, as peers and not accomplishments. And never, ever, under any circumstance, equate a potential romantic encounter as a conquest—unless the related military metaphors of "bloody revolt" and "the reign of the Terror" appeal to you as well. Besides, have you ever had a conquest kick you in the nuts?

(E-mail author at bohemiansamurai@yahoo.com)

Oh caption, my caption!

Winning caption: Do phantom no nagpa-opera
Sender: Louie Sabater

By Gino de la Paz and Tals Diaz

YI-HHEE! Unfortunately, we may never see the faces of Michael Jackson's offspring—Prince Michael I, Paris, and Prince Michael II. But we'll always have their daddy's makeover-ready mug to brighten our day or scare the living crap out of us. And as your entries proved, it's the latter. From "Planet of the Ape" references (yes, Jacko does look like Helena Bonham-Carter's simian character, right?) to random cracks about plastic surgery, you really had a blast making fun of the "Man in the Mirror." One reader, Errol Zshornack, in fact, wrote in to quote her 7-year-old son (probably our youngest ever captioneer—Yay!) who had this to say about the troubled King of Pop: "Look Ma, the monkey looks like a man!" Great job, kid! But top honors go to Louie Sabater and his Taglish opus. Dial 897-8808 and ask to be connected to our Marketing Department for your "Thriller" of a prize.

Here's the rest of last week's greatest hits:

MANKEY: Creature from Neverland
Sender: Sen H. Cordial
Caption: Peter Pan-ager
Sender: Orville Ocampo

This Week's Challenge

Kung Hei Fat Choy! Kung Pu Hustle! Belated Happy Ash Wednesday! Blahbity blah blah. Okay enough.

Listen up, y'all. Since it is the post-Valentine's season our big big (black) hearts have decided to give you loyal caption contestants a big treat: AN OVERNIGHT STAY AT HOLIDAY INN, CLARK, PAMPANGA FOR TWO. And as if the uppercase letters weren't obvious enough, we'll say it again. WE'RE GIVING A BIG PRIZE THIS WEEK. Clear? So if you wanna go on a weekend getaway with your loved one for some post V-day "action" (wink wink), gaze at this week's challenge. Captured by our zoo paparazzi Joan Bondoc, here we find Pasquiao the orangutan swapping some romantic spit with Sasalyan Kita the rooster. We kid you not. These are their real names and you can find them canoodling at the Malabon Zoo! So get crackin' on those wisecracks and send those captions to super@inquirer.com.ph or send inquirer sup name/city/caption to 2207 for Globe or 283 for Smart. Kiss kiss, palanggas!

Super!'s caption: Forbidden love